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The Lady with the
MAGIC EYES

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biography

THE GREAT BEAST

novels

THE LADY IN THE TOWER

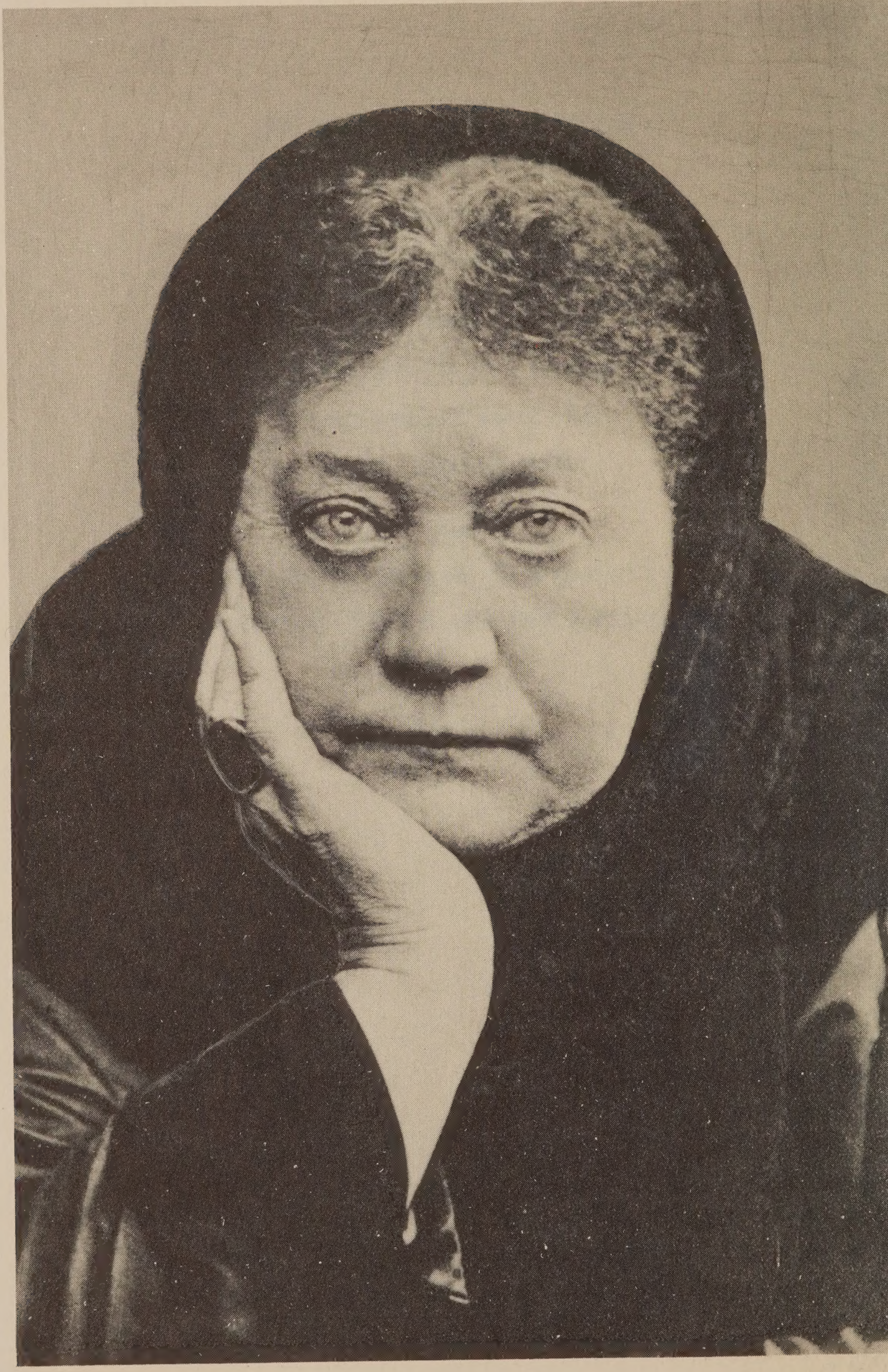
THE BRIGHT BLUE SKY

A GIRL AMONG POETS

essays

THE MAGIC OF ALEISTER CROWLEY

THOMAS BROWN AND THE ANGELS



MADAME BLAVATSKY

The Lady with the MAGIC EYES

Madame Blavatsky – Medium and Magician

by

JOHN SYMONDS

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THOMAS YOSELOFF, *Publisher*
NEW YORK

Published in the United States 1960
by
Thomas Yoseloff, *Publisher*
11 East 36th Street
New York 16, N. Y.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 60-13138

To
GEORGE H. BROOK

Printed in the United States of America

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I WISH to thank Mr. Gerald Yorke for the loan of books and pamphlets and a boxful of unpublished letters written by early members of the Theosophical Society; Dr. Leo Steinberg for sending me transcripts from American periodicals not available in England; and Mr. Charles Drage for putting his knowledge of Russian and Sanskrit at my disposal. For the material of a footnote, I am indebted to Mr. Rupert Gleadow; and to Mr. Kenneth Grant for a valuable communication. I am grateful to Mr. C. Nelson Stewart, learned in all matters relating to theosophy, for a bibliography of obscure works, and for reading the proofs; and to the Theosophical Society for their immediate and generous response to a request for the loan of photographs.

J. S.

Hampstead, London, *December*, 1958

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But time scatters all illusions, and the truth at the end prevails.

Colonel Olcott

Chapter One

THE SWAMI AND OTHERS

A LADY of middle-class means and literary pretensions, in whose house I found myself staying, informed me one afternoon that, as a child, she had sat upon the lap of Madame Blavatsky.

She explained: "I was taken along to Avenue Road." Avenue Road is in St. John's Wood, North-west London.

For the last few days my hostess had not been feeling well, and was propped up by pillows in bed. She had a long narrow head, red hair, and delusions of grandeur.

I did not know that Madame Blavatsky had lived in St. John's Wood. In fact, all I knew of her was that she had founded the Theosophical Society with assistance from an American called Colonel Olcott, and that she had written two ponderous works, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*.

I wish I had asked my hostess what impression she had retained of the memorable occasion, but I was not particularly interested in Madame Blavatsky. Moreover, I did not believe that she had sat upon Madame Blavatsky's lap; it was, I thought, just one of those things she said.

She had a curious collection of books which, she told me, she had inherited from a companion of hers, a poet, who had left her for another woman. I gathered that he had met her—this other woman—during a lecture at the Theosophical Society.

His books revealed a mind which was interested more in facts than theories, in history rather than philosophy. And he preferred the bypaths to the highway—books on such subjects as magic, witchcraft, demonology, folklore and, of course, poetry. They were arranged on shelves of deal board round the walls. The only other furniture of the room, apart from the carpet and the velvet curtains, was a wicker couch, and a small circular tripod table, on which stood a coloured wax flower under a glass case.

Here I would spend the time between meals, writing letters and browsing on such works as John Timb's *English Eccentrics and Eccentricities*, in an edition of 1875; Charles Mackay's *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*; John Brand's *Observations on Popular Antiquities*; and *Merry-Go-Down*, *A Gallery of Gorgeous Drunkards Through the Ages* by one Rab Noolas, a curious name which empties itself of all nomenclatural interest when spelt backwards.

I read the whole of a book called *The Way of a Virgin*, which was part of a series entitled *Anthologica Rarissima*. It was—still is—a collection of charming folk-tales, full of fantasy and humour, but too frank for purposes of ordinary publication. "Printed for Members of the Brovan Society by Private Subscription and for Private Circulation only. London, 1922."

I spent a sultry afternoon on *Memoirs of the Sansons*, seven generations of executioners, edited by the last holder of the office, Henri Sanson, who in 1841 was summarily dismissed from his post. His grandfather, Charles Henri Sanson, harvested heads during the Revolution, and affected a nicety of feeling which is only becoming in a civil servant. Every morning he would walk along the well-sanded paths of his garden, watering his flowers. One day he stopped before some scarlet tulips and exclaimed:

"How fresh and red they are! If people saw them, they would say I water them with blood!"

I dropped these gruesome memoirs on to the floor, and extracted from the shelf a fairly thick volume which announced on its spine in gold capital letters against a red background the mysterious words SATYARTH PRAKASH. It had been printed in India, and very badly printed, too—full of misprints, wrong founts used, letters upside down, type running off the page, *et cetera.* It was by an Indian reformer called Swami Dayananda Sarasvati.* "Swami" is a Hindu title corresponding to Lord or Master. *Satyarth Prakash* was translated as "The Light of Truth", and the sort of truth the author had in mind was of the highest kind. This book was, in fact, an interpretation of the Vedas, the Hindu scriptures. It also contained some rationalistic criticism of the Old and New Testaments, rather after the manner of Tom Paine's *The Age of Reason.* But the Swami mainly castigated his own people. For example, he was filled with abhorrence for the worshippers of the left-hand path, the *Wam Marg*, who conduct their rites with women. To this author, the Vedas were the fountain-head of all religions, and he stoutly, and even angrily, defends them. A certain Mr. A. O. Hume, and to my surprise Colonel Olcott, Madame Blavatsky's companion, came in for a broadside.

> "As for their assertion that my Veda Bashya [commentary on the Vedas] can only be infallible if I be God, or inspired by him, I say that I am not God, but his servant, and that God has revealed the Vedas for the benefit of mankind. I write the commentary on them according to the extent of my knowledge and reason and in an unbiased spirit. It has undergone the scrutinizing perusal of the public, and no one has come forward to find fault with it, and yet the doubts of some persons about the Vedas are not removed! If Mr. Hume has any objection against the Vedas, he should publish it in a newspaper. I shall then send my answer to the same paper. If the chiefs of the Theosophical Society raise a mere groundless doubt, there is no help for it. They are atheists, believing in spirits and witches. It is true that those who leave the one true God will fall into superstition, deception, and belief in imaginary beings, such as Koot Hoomi, &c. Newspapers publish reports of Colonel Olcott's innumerable cures; if they are true, why does he not cure sick persons before me and thus convince me of the truth of these reports? I challenge the Theosophical Society to show me their spiritual powers or Yogavidya

---

**Sarasvati*, the Hindu goddess of speech, wife of Brahma, is the name of one of the ten Orders of mendicant monks founded by Sankaracharya. Dayananda, literally "the bliss of compassion", was the name the Swami assumed when he joined this Order.

> [knowledge of yoga]. What I have seen of their 'siddhis' of Yoga [ability to perform miracles] is not to be regarded as such. What new things can they be said to have learned now? I consider all these as imaginary dreams."

Dayananda Sarasvati was over six feet tall, and somewhat stout. His biographer, Chhajju Singh, saw his body as "full but perfect". In his brown eyes, judging from his photograph, was a lofty look. He had, says Chhajju Singh, a contemplative and dreamy expression when in repose, but when "the Great Teacher was excited, the glory of his face was the glory of a storm of thunder and lightning".

Messrs. Olcott and Hume had, it seemed, provoked such a storm.

The Swami was a practical as well as a mystical sort of person, and he wasn't taking anything on hearsay. Moreover, he did not despise the inductive method of science. He had read all the works on yoga, a science which raises the capacities of the human mind until it responds to higher vibrations. A knowledge of the nervous system is useful for anyone wishing to become proficient in this ancient science. Through yoga, one can control the nerves to the extent of voluntarily stopping the radial pulse of one wrist, while the other beats normally, and even the heart-beats for a few seconds. Some of the books the Swami had been reading on the subject described the human anatomy in a manner which, to his irritation, he found impossible to understand.

An opportunity unexpectedly arose for him to verify these descriptions: he saw a dead body floating down the Ganges. He quickly slipped out of his clothes, dived in and brought the corpse ashore. Now he could make a little investigation of man's inner organs. He proceeded to cut the body open with a large knife in "the best manner I could". First of all he took out and examined the heart, then portions of the head and neck, and tried to reconcile them with his books. Finding that they did not tally, and believing that Nature should have the last say, he tore the books to pieces and threw them, after the corpse, into the river, keeping only the works on yoga by the noble Patanjali, who lived in the second century B.C.

* * *

The following afternoon, while I was drinking dandelion coffee with my hostess, I suddenly asked her: "Have you ever heard of Koot Hoomi?"

"Of course I've heard of Koot Hoomi," she replied, her eyes sparkling. "The *Master* Koot Hoomi you should have said. H.P.B. met him."

"H.P.B.?"

She made an exclamation of disapproval. "Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, known as H.P.B. to—well, to everyone who knows."

"Oh?" I did not disclose that the book I'd been reading upstairs described Koot Hoomi as an *imaginary being.* ✓

She went on to say that there was more than one Master; another by the name of Morya had taken H.P.B. as his *chela.* ✓

"You know what a *chela* is, don't you?"

"Isn't it a Sanskrit word meaning 'pupil'?"

A nod of her head told me that I was right. She talked of Koot Hoomi as if he were still alive.

"He must be very old," I said.

"Perhaps by our standards, but not by his own." She added after a moment's silence, "He lives in Tibet."

"Ah, Tibet," I replied thoughtfully. I sipped my dandelion coffee.

I should have hated her to think I was sceptical of anything she was saying about the Master Koot Hoomi, and the Great White Brotherhood of Adepts who, in their abode in Tibet, are constantly seeking ways and means of helping mankind; for I did not want to hurt her feelings or be parted from the library of miscellaneous books upstairs. And, for all I knew, she may have been right. I disagreed with most of the things she said, but I liked her company and felt related to her, at least on the plane of the imagination.

I grew interested in Dayananda Sarasvati. He had founded an organization called the *Arya Samaj*,* a Hindu reform society, with the object of restoring the Aryan religion to its pure state, and of extirpating foreign religions, such as Christianity and Islam. He was also a social reformer and wished to see the end of child marriages, the caste system and other follies. This vigorous and inspired man had travelled all over India and spoken against the worship of images—India is full of images—and doctrines such as "the uplifting of mountains, the raising of the dead, the splitting of the moon, the belief in the creation of the world without a cause, the unbelief in God or atheism, the self-assumed title of Brahma, the identity of the Soul and God, the telling on a rosary. . . ." In the heyday of British imperialism, which did not seem to trouble him at all, he had reminded his fellow countrymen of their religious heritage—the Vedas. He died in 1883 at the age of fifty-nine, and was mourned by the whole of India.

I wondered why he should suddenly turn aside, in his brief autobiography, to attack Colonel Olcott and Mr. Hume. And who was A. O. Hume, and what connexion had he, and Colonel Olcott, with the Great Teacher? They had all long since died, but the angry voice of Dayananda still echoed, so to speak, in the pages of *Satyarth Prakash*. And what had Colonel Olcott, described by the Swami as a quack and a dreamer, to say about the Swami? He must have said, or done, something to the Swami which had annoyed him, otherwise the Swami wouldn't have been so angry with him. And where did Madame Blavatsky come in? For she was one of the chiefs of the Theosophical Society.

**Samaj* means society, and *Arya Samaj* can be translated as "The Society of Men of Good Will".

Chapter Two

LIGHT AND DARK CIRCLES

COLONEL OLCOTT had written, I found, a kind of rambling autobiography in six volumes. It is called *Old Diary Leaves*, a title in keeping with his picturesque style. It does not start with his parents and his earliest impressions, but with his meeting, when he was forty-two, with Madame Blavatsky. He ignores his life before this event, presumably because he had no earlier diary leaves to browse on.

Madame Blavatsky was a year older than Colonel Olcott. Her life, too, can be said to begin from this time—14 October, 1874—for very little is definitely known of her previously.

The strokes of Olcott's handwriting are full and far-reaching; he thrusts up to the spiritual heights, and down to the gloomy depths. He was not an Englishman, but an American—an honest-to-God, somewhat naïve American. He had served in the Federal forces during the Civil War, but his rank of Colonel was neither earned nor exercised on the battlefield; it was a brevet given to him when he was selected by the government to be a Special Commissioner for the War Office—in plain English, a detective—to investigate charges of corruption in government departments. For two years he was engaged in this work, and so successfully did he root out graft that he was commended and then requested by the Secretary of the Navy to turn his talents to navy yards.

By profession he was a lawyer, with an office in New York, but in his spare time, of which he seemed to have had plenty, he wrote accounts of spiritualistic séances for newspapers. Spiritualism, which can be described as the art of getting in touch with the spirit, or soul, of a dead person, had become very popular in the United States during the middle of the nineteenth century, and its supporters were counted in millions. It is a form of necromancy, but without elaborate paraphernalia and long-winded rituals. The whole business is reduced, simply, to a medium who can, with the aid of a "Spirit Control", get in touch straight away with the spirit world, the world where the dead have gone.

* * *

"*Permettez moi, Madame*," said the Colonel, producing a light for Madame Blavatsky's cigarette. He had found her amid a crowd in the dining-room of the Eddy homestead, a farm near the township of Chittenden, in the State of Vermont, several hundred miles from the city of New York.

The Eddy brothers, William and Horatio, were mediums who could not only get in touch with the spirits of the dead, but could produce or materialize their physical forms. The dead were thus awakened on the Eddys' farm to everyone's amazement. The Colonel, accompanied by an artist called Kappes, had arrived there on 17 September, and was sending to the New York *Daily Graphic* detailed accounts of his intercourse with phantoms. These articles were a sensation.

Madame Blavatsky was a big woman with broad shoulders. Her hair was a thick blonde mop, and, as the Colonel said, crinkled to the roots like the fleece of a Cotswold ewe. Her face was massive, with high cheekbones and flat nose—"Kalmuco-Buddhisto-Tartaric features", to use her own description. But the most conspicuous feature of all was her huge eyes of startling blue.

"Good gracious, look at that specimen, will you?" said the Colonel to Kappes.

Kappes turned round and his eyes rested on a woman in a red shirt which, at that time, indicated a sympathy for Garibaldi's libertarian views, not for socialism. Madame Blavatsky was as unconventional in her dress as she was in her speech.

"I went straight across," wrote the Colonel in his *Old Diary*

Leaves, "and took a seat opposite her to indulge in my favourite habit of character study."

After dinner, Madame Blavatsky and her companion, a French widow, went outside the house, and Madame Blavatsky rolled herself a cigarette which occasioned the Colonel's remark.

She asked him how long he had been there, and what he thought of the phenomena, the materializations. The Colonel does not say what he replied, but we know that this was his second visit to Chittenden and that he was profoundly impressed.

Madame Blavatsky explained that she had been drawn to Chittenden by reading the articles in the *Daily Graphic*.

"I hesitated before coming here," she said, "because I was afraid of meeting that Colonel Olcott."

"Why should you be afraid of him, Madame?" asked the Colonel.

"Oh, because I fear he might write about me in his paper."

A coy reply: Madame's attitude was, of course, entirely coy, but it was the right attitude for the occasion. The Colonel told her that she had nothing to fear on that score, and then introduced himself.

They became friends at once. "Each of us," writes the Colonel in a rather round-about way, "felt as if we were of the same social world, cosmopolitans, free-thinkers, and in closer touch (with each other) than with the rest of the company. It was the voice of common sympathy with the higher occult side of man and nature; the attraction of soul to soul, not that of sex to sex."

It was not, therefore, a case of love-at-first-sight in the ordinary sense of the phrase. The Colonel loses no time in telling us that he had no desire to go to bed with Madame Blavatsky in spite of there being no M. Blavatsky. (Actually there was a M. Blavatsky, but he was far away, much older than his spouse, or so she said, and she hadn't clapped eyes on him for twenty-six years.)

In her youth, Madame Blavatsky was beautiful, but her beauty soon faded. We know this on the good authority of her cousin, the Russian statesman Count Witte, who first made her acquaintance when he was a boy of nine—and she a young woman of about twenty-seven—and who continued seeing her for some years afterwards when his judgment had grown more mature. He describes her face as having apparently lost its beauty, and bearing "all the traces of a passionate and tempestuous life". He also says of her that she developed an early obesity and dressed slovenly. But her eyes fascinated him: he had never before seen such large azure eyes; they sparkled in a manner which he found quite indescribable.* And now she was forty-three and larger still—she turned the scales at sixteen-and-a-half stone—and only her enormous eyes were still beautiful.

But beauty and sexual attraction are not one and the same thing. A woman can be plain but sexually attractive, and the converse, of course, is equally true.

As far as the Colonel was concerned, H. P. Blavatsky was just his "chum", not his mistress, in spite of his having confessed to an addiction to mistresses. Their relationship was entirely platonic, a "chumship" he calls it. "Some base people from time to time dared to suggest that a closer tie bound us together, as they had that that poor, malformed, persecuted H.P.B. had been the mistress of various other men, but no pure person could hold to such an opinion after passing any time in her company, and seeing how her every look, word and action proclaimed her sexlessness."

This is an exaggeration: Madame Blavatsky wasn't all that unattractive; and in what way she was "malformed" I cannot think, unless the Colonel was referring to a highly specific part of her anatomy.

In 1885, when she was ill in Europe, she was examined by a Dr. Leon Oppenheim who, at her request, wrote out a certificate testifying that she suffered from *Anteflexio Uteri*, a displacement of the womb. This certificate thus scotched the rumour of her having had an illegitimate child; it does not, however, establish that coitus was impossible, as she carelessly deduced. "Here's your stupid new certificate with your dreams of *virgo intacta* in a woman who had all her guts out, womb and all, by a fall from horseback," she wrote to Colonel Olcott, who was trying to put down rumours of her having led an immoral life. "And yet the doctor looked, examined *three* times, and says what the Professor Bodkin and Pirogoff said at Pskoff in 1862. I could never have had connexion with *any* man without an inflammation, because I am lacking something and the place is filled up with some crooked cucumber."

**The Memoirs of Count Witte*, 1921.

* * *

The Eddys were a remarkable family. Here are a few facts about them. Zephaniah Eddy, a farmer, married a girl of Scots descent called Julia Ann Macombs. In 1846 he exchanged his farm at Weston, Vermont, for another at Chittenden. Julia had the gift of foresight or clairvoyance, and the much rarer gift of seeing ghosts, and of receiving visits from them. It was a family trait; her mother could also see ghosts, and her great-great-great-grandmother was hanged as a witch.

Zephaniah did not approve of these matters. The Colonel described him as a religious bigot. His wife, Julia, made light therefore of her capacities.

Their first child took after the father, and there was no trouble; but unfortunately for Mrs. Eddy, all the children born subsequently took after her. They began their occult careers by spontaneous levitation. "After they were tucked away in bed, their little bodies would be lifted gently and floated through the air by some mysterious power. In vain the father stormed and threatened. . . ."

The life of the Eddy children was one long round of misery. They couldn't even go to school, for the spirits rapped on the very lids of their desks and drove the teacher to fury.

One night when Horatio was four years old "a little creature covered with white fur suddenly appeared in the room where he and three of the other children were sleeping, jumped upon their bed, sniffed at their faces, and then began growing larger and larger until it turned into a great luminous cloud that gradually shaped itself into a human form".

The children screamed, and the shape was not dispelled until the mother came running in. This may, of course, have been the hallucination of a hysterical child, but the documents relating to witches are full of similar descriptions.

Zephaniah regarded all this as the work of the Devil. On one occasion when William fell into a deep trance, he punched, pinched and then poured scalding water down his back. These methods failed to bring him round, so he placed a blazing ember on the unfortunate lad's head.

As he was unable to make his children behave in a more normal fashion, Mr. Eddy decided to exhibit them. Thus, the Eddy children went on tour—a humiliating and even dangerous experience, for they raised the enmity as well as the curiosity of the crowd and were frequently mobbed. And so carelessly did riggers bind with cords their young limbs (to remove all chance of their cheating) that permanent scars were raised on their wrists.

If the dead can speak to the living, and be seen in their former bodies, although somewhat faded, then, reasoned the Colonel, no further proof is required for the doctrine of immortality. The implications of his researches were tremendous. Carried away by enthusiasm, he sneers at Thomas Henry Huxley for describing spiritualism as an imposture, and scolds the American Association for devoting hours to a discussion on the habits of the tumble-bug, and the fact that the pitcher-plant (*Saracenia variolaris*) catches bugs, instead of investigating the astounding phenomenon of materialization. He quotes from an editorial on spiritualism in *Scientific American* in support of his attitude.

> "If true, it will become the one grand event of the world's history; it will give an imperishable lustre of glory to the nine-

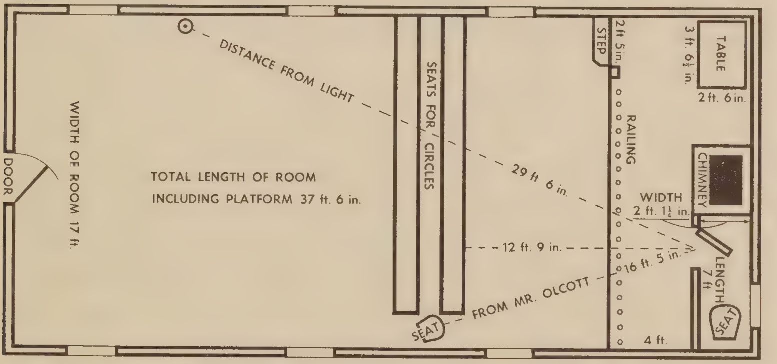
teenth century. Its discoverer will have no rival in renown, and his name will be written high above any other."

The Colonel saw himself, not unnaturally, as this discoverer.

* * *

The materializations took place upstairs in a room called the Circle Room, which had been specially built for the purpose. It was a small hall, thirty-seven-and-a-half feet long by seventeen feet wide, with a platform, two feet above the floor level, at one end. Along the outer edge of the platform was a balustrade or hand-rail which, as far as the Colonel could see, served no useful purpose, except perhaps that of deterring rude spectators from rushing forward to grasp the phantoms.

The circles were either Light Circles or Dark Circles; that is to say, the séances were either in the dim light of a murky lamp or in the pitch dark—the windows were blacked out with blankets to exclude even starlight.


DISTANCE FROM LIGHT
29 ft 6 in.
DOOR
WIDTH OF ROOM 17 ft.
TOTAL LENGTH OF ROOM INCLUDING PLATFORM 37 ft. 6 in.
SEATS FOR CIRCLES
12 ft. 9 in.
FROM MR. OLCOTT
16 ft. 5 in.
SEAT
STEP
2 ft 5 in.
RAILING
3 ft. 6½ in.
TABLE
2 ft. 6 in.
CHIMNEY
WIDTH 2 ft. 1¼ in.
LENGTH 7 ft
SEAT
4 ft.

Plan of the Circle Room

In the right-hand corner of the platform against the wall was built a narrow closet or cabinet, two-and-a-half feet deep by seven feet long and seven feet high. It was entered by a door nearly six feet high by two feet wide. Inside was a window two feet square. Here the entranced medium sat during the séances.

The spectators were on benches in the middle of the hall. They had come from near and far and were a motley crew: ladies and gentlemen, journalists, divines and ex-divines, sickly dreamers, farmers, inventors, architects, peddlers of salves and nostrums—the Colonel's list is quite a long one. They transformed the Eddy homestead into a hotel, and people were turned away at the door for lack of accommodation or because the proprietors did not like the look of their faces.

Sometimes there was dancing in the Circle Room for half an hour or so before the séance began and music, as at the cinema, was played during the intervals. Thus the materializations of spirit forms provided a kind of amusement; and probably sexual stimulation as well—owing to the excitement, the darkness, and the closeness of the spectators to one another.

The Colonel had been staying there for nearly a month, eating at one of the two long tables in the dining-room, and passing many a pleasant hour in the kitchen, when Madame Blavatsky arrived.

Chapter Three

PEOPLE FROM THE OTHER WORLD

Lord Adare, and two other sober gentlemen, had witnessed in 1868 the celebrated medium and levitationist, Daniel Dunglas Home, float out of a third-storey window at 15 Ashley Place, London, S.W.1, and in at another, but the Colonel was not impressed. He tells us that Horatio Eddy had been carried at the age of six to a mountain top, a distance of three miles; and his sister, Mary, had been raised to the ceiling of Hope Chapel, New York City, upon which she had written her name. Her little boy, Warren, when only five years of age, had "floated in dark circles", screaming all the while to be let down. Moreover, the Eddys were capable of every phase of mediumship and seership up to the most miraculous feat of all —the production of materialized phantom forms.

On the first night of the Colonel's visit a violent gale was blowing and rain was pelting down. In the Circle Room there were twenty-five persons, several of whom, like himself, had arrived only that day. At seven o'clock William entered the room, mounted the platform and disappeared inside the cabinet, the door of which was not closed but hung with a curtain. After a while, the piping treble of an old woman's voice addressed some remarks from the cabinet to the effect that it was a bad night for manifestations and only the strongest spirits could show themselves. The Colonel thought it was William speaking in falsetto. He took out his notebook and crossed off the first event of the evening: it was, he thought, likely to be of no interest to spiritualists.

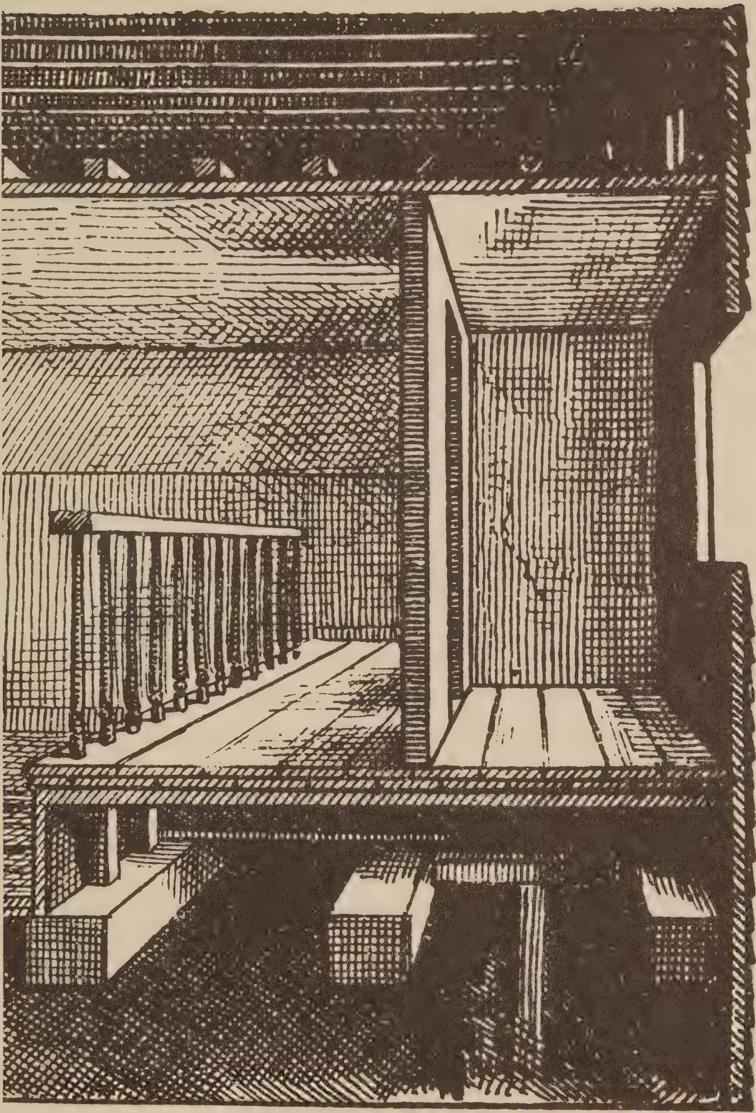
The curtain stirred and the spirit form of Honto, an American Indian woman appeared. She was nothing like William in appearance, being shorter by several inches, of dark complexion and marked Indian features. But this opinion the Colonel formed only after seeing her on about thirty different occasions: on the night of 17 September, when his eyes hadn't grown accustomed to the dull light, he fancied that she was of William's height and build, and suspected she was only William in fancy dress.

On the platform were two living persons—not phantoms of the dead—in addition to the medium in the closet. They were Mrs. R. Cleveland and Mr. E. V. Pritchard, of Albany, New York: they usually occupied chairs on the platform, one on either side. On this particular evening, Honto produced, "apparently from the air itself", a knitted shawl, also described as a long piece of gauzy fabric, about the size of a single bedsheet. She threw it over the railing and thus gave everyone the opportunity of seeing that it was opaque, that is to say "materialized". She then threw the shawl over her head like a mantilla and produced another of black woollen stuff. Someone in the audience asked her if she would permit Mrs. Cleveland to feel the beating of her heart. She agreed, opened her dress and Mrs. Cleveland laid her hand upon her bare flesh.

No reason was given for this request, and I am in the dark as to what it was intended to prove or disprove, but Mrs. Cleveland told Colonel Olcott that the breast was cold and moist, which was, I suppose, the least one would expect, seeing that she was no longer alive. In spite of this, however, her heart beat feebly.

The next materialized spirit to appear behind the railing was another Indian, a squaw with a dark face who called herself Bright Star. She was shapely, tall, and had a dignified carriage. When she had finished she disappeared, and Daybreak, another squaw, appeared. We are told that Daybreak danced to the fiddle; it is not clear who played the fiddle, but I suspect it was a spirit, one not materialized to the audience, and only dimly visible to a clairvoyant.

Daybreak gone, there appeared a fully accoutred Indian, the



The Platform in the Circle Room

giant Winnebago chief called Santum. He was six feet three inches tall, that is six inches taller than William Eddy. He carried a powder horn, slung by a belt across his shoulder. The horn was real enough, for it had been given to him by a visitor on an earlier occasion.

Several pale-faces now appeared: firstly, William Reynolds, a former shoe manufacturer of the firm of Reynolds Brothers, Utica, New York. During the Civil War he was Colonel of the 14th New York Artillery, attached to the 9th Army Corps; he died of fever, contracted on service, on 6 May, 1874. He was dressed in black and wore a full beard. "As well as I could distinguish," wrote Colonel Olcott, "he was a square-shouldered, gentlemanly-appearing man."

His brother, John E. Reynolds, who died in 1860, quickly followed. He wore a dark suit and had a moustache. His shoulders, observed the Colonel, who was on the alert for fraud, sloped differently from William Eddy's.

The audience was then favoured with the appearance of the late William Brown, of York, Pennsylvania. He was the father of one Edward Brown, who had recently married William Eddy's sister, Delia. Presumably because of this family tie, he made his salutation to the audience in the Circle Room nearly every evening.

This gentleman, unlike the others, opened his lips and spoke. At first, he uttered in a whisper a few simple words of greeting; then he worked towards his full, natural voice. The Colonel observed that, with the exception of a manifestation which he had witnessed at one séance in London in 1870, he had never heard a spirit voice before. He was amazed; it was "as though a living man stood before me, and not a being from the other world".

The phenomena of the evening concluded with a touching reunion scene. In the audience was a German music teacher, one Max Lenzberg, with his wife and daughter, Lena. At William Eddy's request, Lenzberg played on a flute, and occupied a seat in advance of the front row of spectators. After

Mr. Brown's departure, the curtain was drawn aside and the audience saw, standing on the threshold, two children. One was a baby of about a year, the other a child of twelve or thirteen; behind them, indistinctly observed, was the spirit form of an old woman.

"Mrs. Lenzberg, with a mother's instinct, recognized her departed little ones and, with tender pathos, eagerly asked in German if they were hers. Immediately there came several loud responsive raps, and little Lena, as if drawn from her mother's side by an irresistible power, crept forward and peered at the forms that stood just at the edge of the black shadows of the cabinet. There was a moment's silence as she strained her eyes; then she said joyfully, '*Ja! Ihr seid meine kleinen Schwestern! Nicht wahr?*' ['Yes! You are my little sisters, aren't you?'] Again came the responsive raps, and the spirit forms danced and waved their arms as if in glee at the reunion."

Sceptics had contended that the baby forms were due to pillows or white wrappings round William's legs, but the Colonel would not accept this. He realized, of course, that people would think that William had hidden some of his friends in the cabinet. But he dispensed with the charge of confederacy by observing that he had seen the spirit form of Honto dissolve up to the waist; and that one evening Mrs. Cleveland—the lady privileged to sit on the platform—was actually dancing with Honto when she observed, to her horror, that the Indian's arm below the shoulder, which she had taken hold of in error, was not materialized, and she was grasping only the sleeve of the robe. The solid hand was attached to a vapoury arm! Again, sometimes only a hand would appear from the cabinet, solid enough to those who clasped it, but thrust out from the other world to cheer the living. The Colonel observed sadly that it was a vast pity that this matter of intercourse between the two worlds should be so tainted with falsehood as to make vigilance necessary. The Colonel himself was satisfied beyond doubt that the materializations were genuine, and he was able, therefore, to look forward cheerfully to the time when he would become a spirit himself.

William's light circle was followed by Horatio's dark circle. The lamp was extinguished, and the windows blacked out. The gruff voice of the sailor spirit, George Dix, and the piping voice of the little girl spirit, Mayflower—she was only twelve when she died—were heard, greeting the audience in the darkness. Dix's story, which he told like a professional entertainer, was that he was drowned when the steamship *President* went down; Mayflower's tale was that she died at the hands of the Indians a century before. She was an Italian immigrant. The scene of her death was on the Maine frontier.

Horatio, the medium through whose genius all this was happening, was sitting in a chair facing the audience with his back to the railing and the stage. His hands were bound behind his back.

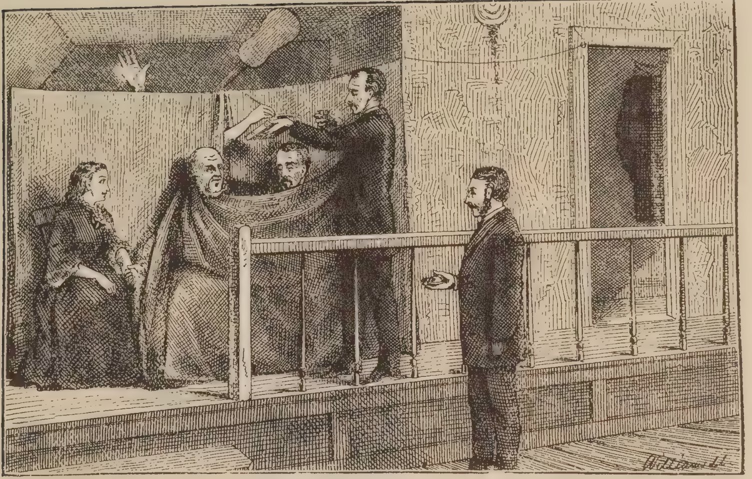
George Dix was a spinner of yarns, some of them indelicate. He also sang, whistled, and played the fiddle. He faded away and a dead silence pervaded the room. Next item: the spirits of a dozen or so howling and leaping Indians who beat drums, rattled tambourines, blew horns and made a terrible din. They were followed by the sound of two infuriated spirits, hacking at one another with swords.

When the candle was lit they disappeared, the medium was still bound in his chair and there was no perspiration on his face—the proof that he hadn't been doing it all—but the floor was littered with musical instruments, bells, swords, etc.

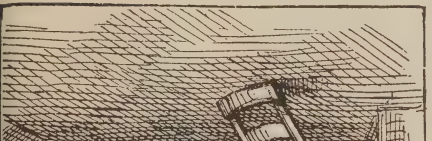
The light was extinguished and the spectators, to ensure that there was no confederate among them, joined hands: after a while cold, clammy hands began to stroke their faces, pat their heads, slap their backs. The Colonel was kissed on the cheek.

The light was hurriedly put on—nothing!

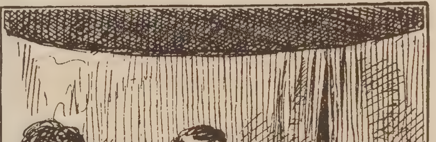
The light was extinguished again, and then the voice of the drowned sailor, George Dix, announced that "the band", composed of spirits known as Electa, Honto, Santum, Rosa, Mayflower and others, would play the piece called *The Storm at Sea*. Max Lenzberg, the music teacher, wrote an appreciative



The Light Circle

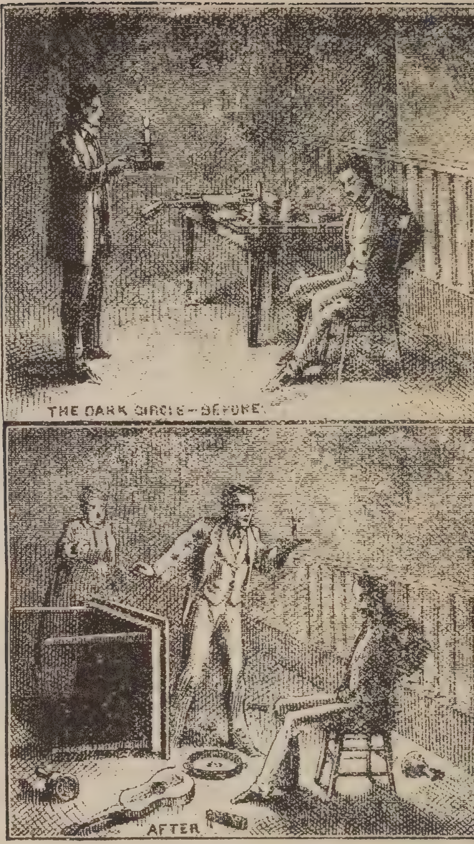


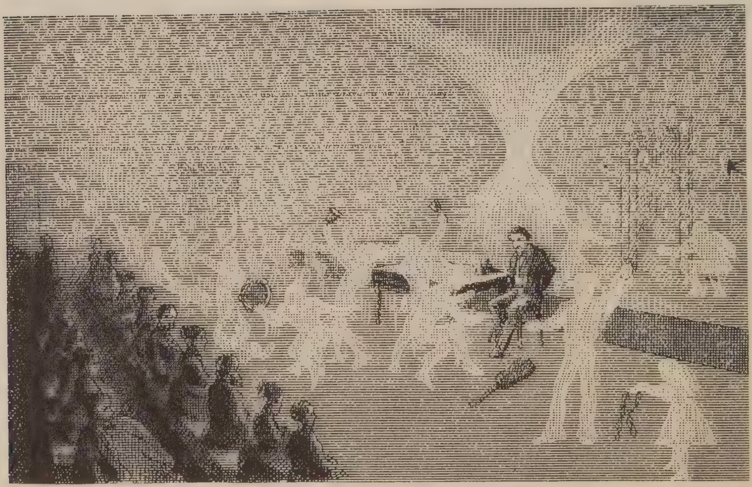
SPIRIT ELEVATING A CHAIR.



SPIRIT HAND, DRAWING BALANCE.

The Dark Circle


THE DARK CIRCLE—BEFORE.
AFTER



letter on this concert to Colonel Olcott, in which he pointed out that there were no sounds of footsteps among the invisible performers.

"Mystery of mysteries!" wrote the Colonel. "What Oedipus can solve the riddle? And how long must we wait for an answer?"

Madame Blavatsky, who was by way of being a medium herself, and a very powerful one, was the Oedipus who ultimately solved the riddle—to the Colonel's, if no one else's, satisfaction. But for the present she added to the repertoire of manifestations. Now even stranger spirits began to appear, speaking tongues which no one in Chittenden had ever heard before. As the Colonel told the readers of the *Daily Graphic*:

> "The arrival of a Russian lady of distinguished birth and rare educational and natural endowments was an important event in the history of Chittenden. This lady—Madame Helen P. de Blavatsky—has led a very eventful life, travelling in most of the lands of the Orient, searching for antiquities at the base of the Pyramids, witnessing the mysteries of Hindu temples, and pushing with armed escort far into the interior of Africa. . . . In the whole course of my experience, I never met so interesting and, if I may say so without offence, eccentric a character."

"To go far away is but to return," says the Chinese proverb. Madame Blavatsky had gone far to the west, but on her very first day at Chittenden she was greeted by one Michalko Guegidze, in native costume, whom she had last seen in Georgia, southern Russia, where she had lived as a child. He had been dead since 1869, killed in a street accident.

She asked him in Georgian if he were really Michalko, to which he replied by sweeping the strings of a guitar he was holding.

"Speak to me, my good fellow."

No reply.

"If it is you, knock five times or give five sweeps of the guitar." Then she asked him to play the Georgian national air, the *Lezguinka*. He obligingly played it.

The Colonel was enthusiastic about these visitors from the other world; this was just as well, for he had to write reports on them, and if he believed the whole business was a fraud, he could pack up and go home. But he did not believe this. On the contrary; and his book, *People from the Other World*, illustrated with light-hearted drawings by the artist Kappes, is a long plea to the reader to take his word for it.

What I find surprising about the reports of these spirit forms is that they were, on occasions, quite substantial. They were not ectoplasmic, that is, made of that vapoury stuff which is said to issue from a medium's body, but were as solid as living persons.

Little Lena, the daughter of the music teacher, confirmed this, and obligingly put it in writing, not very childlike writing, but perhaps Victorian children wrote in this formal, correct way.

> Chittenden, 19 October, 1874.
>
> Mr. Olcott:
>
> My name is Lena Lenzberg, and I am thirteen years old. I was at the dark-circle last night. Mayflower called me out on the floor and we measured heights. We were exactly the same. I felt her back and head against mine, and she kissed me after we measured.
>
> Lena Lenzberg.

The Colonel explained that the substantiality of the spirit forms was due to their ability to "accrete matter from the atmosphere by the operation of their own will". In other words, the physical means of their appearance, the raw material, was supplied, by some unspecified means, from the atmosphere. Now, this implies weight, and the Colonel saw this. As he was curious to know exactly how much weight was accreted, he imported a weighing-machine into the Eddy homestead. Permission was obtained to put the weighing-machine on the platform, but the Colonel was denied the privilege of sitting on the platform beside it.

The weighing of Honto is described thus: she appeared and saluted the audience in her usual fashion; then she turned and scrutinized the strange machine with the suspicion and hesitancy that one would expect of an Indian squaw. But when the Colonel told her what he wanted, she stepped boldly on to the machine and turned the scale at 278 pounds—nearly 20 stone! How she accreted all this from the atmosphere is not explained, but doubtless if one can accrete an ounce, the rest is a matter of course. However, it turned out that she didn't really weigh all this: the counterpoise at the end of the beam appeared to the Colonel too thin for the 100-pound weight, and upon lighting a match it was found to be only a 50-pound weight; therefore Honto weighed only 139 pounds, the weight of a normal middle-aged woman.

The Colonel also experimented with the spring balance. A spirit hand emerged from a slit in the curtain and compressed the spring till the pointer ran down to the 40-pound mark.

The manifestations continued to be influenced by the presence of Madame Blavatsky. On the evening of a cloudy day, when a storm was brewing among the mountain ranges, and when it was "what might be called a fair temperature for manifestations", nine spirits appeared before an audience of thirty-one persons, and among the spirits was a certain Safar Ali Bek. Madame Blavatsky, who was sitting at the "parlour organ" and supplying the incidental music, and was therefore pretty close to the apparitions, immediately recognized him. "There could be," wrote the Colonel, "no mistaking her old Khourdish 'Nouker', and her recognition of him was immediate." Ali Bek also recognized Madame B. He showed this by bending forward to pick up, as it were, a handful of mould and then pretending to scatter it. Next, he pressed his hands to his bosom, a gesture familiar only to the tribes of the Kurdistan.

Chapter Four

THE HASHISH EATER

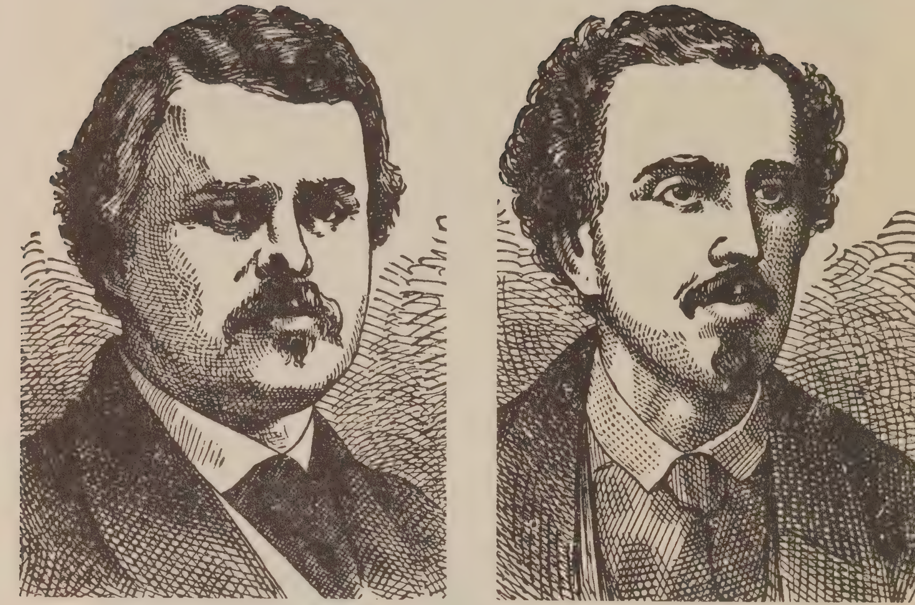
MADAME BLAVATSKY had been in America for only fifteen months, having landed at New York in the summer of the previous year, 1873. It so happens that we know something of what she was doing during these fifteen months because of a young schoolteacher named Elizabeth Holt.

Miss Holt had interrupted her summer holiday and had returned to New York to prepare herself for the new school term. She felt lonely, and therefore her mother, whom she had left in Saratoga, had arranged for her to stay with a Miss Parker, a friend of the family. Now, Miss Parker was living at 222 Madison Street, which was a new, two-storied tenement house, that is, a house made up of single rooms for separate tenants. Downstairs, next to the street door, was a communal sitting-room—it was called the "office"—where the forty or so tenants, who were like one large family, could meet and chat, collect their letters and so on. This place was, in fact, a Home for Working Women run on a non-profit, co-operative basis, with a philanthropic lady in the background who made up the financial losses of the place. Miss Parker had a room on the second floor and in the room next door was . . . Madame Blavatsky, who had just come from Europe; she had travelled steerage and arrived almost penniless.

Fifty years later, when Madame Blavatsky's fame had encircled the globe, and Madame herself had died long since, Miss Holt wrote a memoir of her.

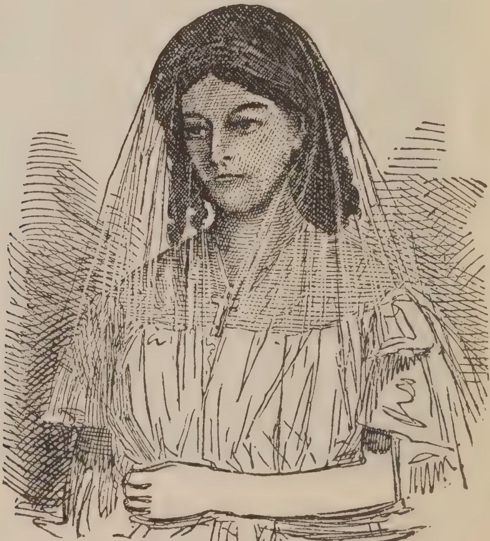
> "Madame Blavatsky sat in the office a large part of her time, but she seldom sat alone; she was like a magnet, powerful enough to

Colonel Henry Steel Olcott. The Theosophical Society was his idea



The Chittenden Mediums, William and Horatio Eddy

Katie King,
a “spirit form”



> draw round her everyone who could possibly come. I saw her, day by day, sitting there rolling her cigarettes and smoking incessantly. She had a conspicuous tobacco pouch, the head of some fur-bearing animal, which she wore round the neck. She was certainly an unusual figure. I think she must have been taller than she looked, she was so broad; she had a broad face and broad shoulders; her hair was a lightish brown and crinkled like that of some Negroes. Her whole appearance conveyed the idea of power. I read somewhere lately an account of an interview with Stalin; the writer said that when you entered the room you felt as if there was a powerful dynamo working. You felt something like that when you were near H.P.B."

Opinion in the Home was divided about her. Some of the tenants accepted her statement, which happened to be true, that she was a Russian aristocrat; others thought that she was just an adventuress down on her luck. Her excitability, and her habit of expressing her opinions vigorously, especially when things went wrong, made Miss Holt decide that she was not "an ethical teacher". But she had courage and hearty good will, especially for the under-dog; she was the sort of person one would appeal to for advice and protection. Miss Holt has a nice little anecdote to illustrate this.

> " Undesirable people were beginning to move into the street, and one evening a young girl from the Home burst in breathless, flung herself down into a chair, and explained that a man had been following her. Whereupon Madame Blavatsky produced a formidable knife from the folds of her dress, and said that she had *that* for any man who tried to molest her. It was her tobacco-cutting knife."

She was certainly unconventional, and when in the course of an account of her life in Paris she mentioned that she had decorated the Empress Eugénie's private apartments, Miss Holt visualized her in trousers, standing on a ladder with brush and paint-pot in hand. She talked about the *diaki* or elementals, which Elizabeth Holt happily glosses as "tricksy little beings"; and she told stories with striking success of the past lives of several people who made up her circle in the office. (From

Elizabeth Holt's account it is not clear if H.P.B. described previous incarnations or merely what had happened in the past.) Miss Parker asked H.P.B. to put her in touch with the spirit of her dead mother, but this H.P.B. declined to do because "her mother was absorbed in higher things and had progressed beyond reach".

Within her first week at the Home, she was interviewed by Anna Ballard of the New York *Sun*, who was looking for copy among new immigrants. H.P.B. told her that she had been in Tibet—the significance of which piece of information was rather lost on Miss Ballard, who did not know that it was almost impossible to get into Tibet, land of priests and magicians—and that she had witnessed in India the celebrated and gruesome rope trick which was last recorded by Edward Melton, an Anglo-Dutch traveller, in 1680.

Early in the next year, 1874, H.P.B. was at the Working Women's Home in Elizabeth Street, New York. There Mrs. Hannah Shepard Wolff, another reporter, met her. Mrs. Wolff may have written about H.P.B. at that time, but her full story did not appear until some years later when Madame Blavatsky's name had become well known. "I saw, half-sitting, half-reclining on the carpetless floor, a scantily clad, and, as I then thought, very unprepossessing woman who was introduced as Madame Blavatsky. She was stout, though not as unwieldly as she subsequently became . . . her eyes were magnetic and peculiar, with a strange fascination in their blue-grey depths, but were in a sense beautiful." Mrs. Wolff was struck by the woolly texture of her light-coloured hair and by the cigarettes she rolled and smoked "with marvellous rapidity". H.P.B. told her that she smoked sometimes as much as a pound's weight of tobacco a day.

She did not have a room entirely to herself in the Home, where she was staying "for economical reasons", but shared it with four other women. By chance, Mrs. Wolff met her again six weeks later. She was now living at a hotel on Fourth Avenue, near Twenty-third Street, and was spending money like water; the money—a few hundred pounds—was her share of an inheritance from her father who had recently died.

The two ladies became friends, but the friendship could not have been a very warm one judging from Mrs. Wolff's disdainful account. From time to time, H.P.B. would call on Mrs. Wolff.

> "I soon learned that she was addicted to the use of hashish. She several times endeavoured to persuade me to try the effect upon myself. She said she had smoked opium, seen its visions and dreamed its dreams, but that the beatitudes enjoyed in the use of hashish were as heaven to its hell. She said she found nothing to compare with its effects in arousing and stimulating the imagination."

That Madame Blavatsky smoked hashish is said with more authority by Albert Leighton Rawson (born 1829). He made her acquaintance in Cairo in 1851, the year he joined the annual caravan to Mecca, disguised as a Mohammedan student of medicine. He met her again in New York in 1875. Rawson was an artist and orientalist: *Appletons' Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 1888, ascribes dictionaries of Persian, Turkish and Arabic to him, and three thousand engravings. In *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, New York, February, 1892, he wrote:

> "She had tried hasheesh in Cairo with success, and she again indulged in it in this city [New York] under the care of myself and Dr. Edward Sutton Smith, who had had a large experience with the drug among his patients at Mount Lebanon, Syria. She said: 'Hasheesh multiplies one's life a thousandfold. My experiences are as real as if they were ordinary events of actual life. Ah! I have the explanation. It is a recollection of my former existences, my previous incarnations. It is a wonderful drug and it clears up a profound mystery.' "

In occultism there is a tradition that drugs, if used in measured doses, lift the veil. Hashish gives visual hallucinations and illusions. In *Les Paradis artificiels* Baudelaire describes the progress of disorientation that this drug produces. Firstly, there is the phase of irrelevant and irresistible hilarity. Attacks of ceaseless mirth. It is useless to struggle against this hilarity. Next, a momentary lull; then a sensation of chilliness in the extremities. Accompanying this is a feeling of stupor; your eyes bulge and your face is flooded with pallor. So much on the debit side. On the credit side, in the words of the poet, your eyes behold the Infinite. External objects acquire strange new appearances; at the same time one's personality disappears. Baudelaire, a hashish smoker himself, happily explains what he means by this: you are, he says, sitting and smoking your hashish pipe. For a moment too long your gaze rests on the bluish clouds arising from the end of your pipe, and you begin to imagine that you yourself are evaporating and that your pipe (in the bowl of which you are huddled and pressed down) has *the strange power of smoking you.* In the visions of hashish smokers appear famous characters of antiquity clothed in military uniforms or sacerdotal robes. Hashish spreads over the whole of life a veneer of magic, transforming desire into reality.

Miss Holt gives some details of how H.P.B. tried to raise money—by designing advertising cards, by making ornamental leather work—and Miss Ballard, who saw H.P.B. within a few days of her arrival from Paris, found her sewing cravats for a living—but fortunately for theosophy she was not very successful at these occupations.

Miss Holt does not say for how long H.P.B. was at the Home in 222 Madison Street; she seems to have been there for several months. Then a French widow, a Mrs. Magnon, appeared and invited her to stay with her until her money arrived from Russia. Apparently Mrs. Magnon was the friend with whom Madame Blavatsky came to Chittenden, speaking French volubly.

It was at Mrs. Magnon's flat in Henry Street that the *diaki*, those tricksy little beings, added to H.P.B.'s troubles. One morning she did not appear for breakfast. Her hostess went to look for her and found her in the same plight as Gulliver found himself when he awoke one fine morning in Lilliput after being washed ashore: the *diaki*, during the night, had sewed H.P.B.'s nightdress to the mattress and she was stuck fast. Miss Holt makes the point that the sewing could not have been done by H.P.B.

We next hear of her in lodgings above a "liquor saloon" on the north-east corner of Fourteenth Street and Fifth Avenue. The friendly Miss Holt called there and "found Madame in a poorly furnished top-floor room; her bed was an iron cot. . . ."

Chapter Five

FREE LOVE

After spending fourteen days at Chittenden and seeing one-hundred-and-nineteen spirits, H.P.B. returned to New York, and took a furnished room at 16 Irving Place. She and the Colonel were now firm, even affectionate, friends, and in her letters to him she signed herself "Jack the Papoose".

She had got to know "the Seer of Poughkeepsie", the famous spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis, who had formulated the underlying principles of modern spiritualism and supplied its phraseology. Davis had been trained as a cobbler but he had abandoned this calling for the wider field of "medical clairvoyance" which he taught himself by a direct method. "By looking through space directly into Nature's laboratory," he explained, "I easily acquired the common (and even the Greek and Latin) names of the various medicines, and also of many parts of the human structure." At the age of twenty-one he published the first volume of his four-volume masterpiece, *The Great Harmonia*. He dictated the entire work to George Bush, the leading Swedenborgian in America, and to Albert Brisbane, who had successfully introduced to America the fantastic ideas of Fourier, the French Utopian socialist. Then Davis plunged into spiritualism, free love, "animal magnetism" and a host of other interesting pursuits.

It was Davis who suggested to Madame Blavatsky that she should get in touch with her countryman, Privy Councillor* Aleksey Nikolayevich Aksakov, ardent spiritualist, editor of the spiritualist *Psychische Studien*, which was published in Leipzig, and friend of the great D. D. Home. H.P.B. did not know Aksakov, so she began her letter to him with an apology. She gave a brief account of the triumphant progress of spiritualism in the United States, and of her own efforts and achievements in that direction. And she hinted that she would appreciate his help in finding a publisher for her Russian translation of the concluding part of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which a medium called James had taken down at the dictation of Dickens's departed spirit.

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*Privy Councillor was the highest rank in the Russian Civil Service.

Before Aksakov had had time to reply or, indeed, before H.P.B.'s letter to him had had time to arrive, she was reading what he was thinking of her. How this happened is clear from her second letter to him. "Hardly a week has gone by since I wrote to you, and already I deeply regret it. This morning, according to my custom when I am in town, I was sitting by my only friend, Andrew Jackson Davis, who is highly respected by everyone here. He had received your letter written in French, and not knowing the language well he asked me to read and translate it for him. In it you write, '*J'ai entendu parler de Madame Blavatsky par un de ses parents, qui la dit un médium assez fort. Malheureusement ses communications ressentent de son moral, qui n'a pas été des plus sévères.*' ['I have heard of Madame Blavatsky from one of her relatives, who told me that she is quite a powerful medium. Unfortunately her communications show the effect of her own moral outlook which is not of the strictest.'] Whoever told you about me, told you the truth, in substance if not in detail. Only God sees what I have suffered for my past. It is clearly my fate to find no remission on earth. This past, like the print of the curse on Cain, has pursued me all my life, and has even followed me to America where I came to get far away from it and from the people who knew me in my youth. You have become the innocent cause of my now being compelled to flee to some other place yet farther, but where, I do not know."

She continued in this vein—the confession of a sinner, heavy with feelings of guilt—but the only sins she mentioned were that until the age of thirty she had been a materialist, which excludes belief in spiritualism, and that out of her hatred of society and its hypocrisy, she ran amok. She concluded her letter with the plea, "I have only one refuge left for myself in the world; this is the respect of American spiritualists, who despise nothing so much as 'free love'. Will it really bring you pleasure to kill morally and for ever a woman who, as it is, has been killed by circumstances?"

Free love, i.e. living with a man one is not married to, is not, in the light of current morals, a very terrible sin, and it was not unheard of in America in the 1870s. On the contrary, America at this time was the one place on earth where such associations had achieved some kind of sanction. Madame Blavatsky, a recent immigrant, was simply uninformed on the matter, and projecting a European conscience or a European fear of intolerance on to the freer American scene. Writing in 1868 on free love in America, William Hepworth Dixon says, ". . . a lady who prefers to live in temporary, rather than in permanent, marriage with the man she loves, does not quietly submit in America to a complete exclusion from society. . . . The number of persons living openly in this kind of union is believed to be very great; so many that the churches and the law courts have been compelled to recognize their existence."* Free love in nineteenth-century America was also the rule of several cults; the most famous was that of the Perfectionists of Oneida, a community of several hundred persons in the State of New York, run by John Humphrey Noyes, who advocated *coitus reservatus* as a means of birth control. "The new commandment is that we love one another," wrote Noyes, "and that not by pairs but *en masse*. We are required to love one another fervently; the fashion of the world forbids a man and a woman who are otherwise appropriated to love one another fervently, but if they obey Christ they must do this." This system, called "complex marriage", flourished until 1879, when Noyes, grown old, bowed to public opinion and the more orthodox form of fervent love. Andrew Jackson Davis, who was far from being "highly respected by everyone", even in spiritualist circles, on account of his love affairs with married women, would have been the last person in America to be shocked at hearing of free love.

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* *Spiritual Wives.*

Privy Councillor Aksakov hastened to reply to Madame Blavatsky that it would "give me no pleasure to destroy the moral reputation of a woman for ever".

The Colonel's articles in the *Daily Graphic* had induced a certain Dr. George M. Beard of the New York Academy of Medicine to pay a visit to Chittenden to see the materializations for himself. He took with him a galvanic battery, and invited the medium to take hold of the machine, so that the current would keep his hands out of mischief. The Eddy brothers declined to do so, for which one cannot altogether blame them; and after an altercation, during which the doctor's head was punched and his machine damaged, he was ordered to leave. He returned to New York and sat down and wrote an article for the *Daily Graphic* in which he explained that the spirits were all impersonations by the two mediums—he had even observed the manœuvres of Horatio's arm—and that they got away with it because the room was in darkness and no one was allowed to approach nearer than twelve feet, with the exception of the "two simple-minded ignorant idiots" who sat on the platform.

H.P.B. had seen more of the Eddy brothers and the materializations than had Dr. Beard, and she promptly wrote a spirited reply:

> "I do not know Dr. Beard personally, nor do I care to know how far he is entitled to wear the laurels of his profession as an M.D., but what I do know is that he may never hope to equal, much less to surpass, such men and *savants* as Crookes, Wallace, or even Flammarion, the French astronomer, all of whom have devoted years to the investigation of Spiritualism. All of them came to the conclusion that, supposing even the well-known phenomenon of the materialization of spirits did not prove the identity of the persons whom they purported to represent, it was not, at all events, the work of mortal hands; still less was it fraud."

She challenged the good doctor, who had said that "with three-dollars' worth of drapery" he could produce such materializations himself, to do so under the same test conditions, and offered him a reward of $500 if he should succeed.

Instead of putting this letter into the post, H.P.B. took it round in person. Through the Colonel's account of her, she was almost a famous figure, certainly a mysterious one, and the editor of the *Graphic* seized the opportunity of making a feature article out of her.

> ". . . She is handsome, with full voluptuous figure, large eyes, well-formed nose, and rich sensuous mouth and chin. She dresses with remarkable elegance, and her clothing is redolent of some subtle and delicious perfume which she has gathered in her wanderings in the Far East. . . ."

Surrounded by members of the editorial staff, H.P.B. asked, "Do you fellows smoke here?"

"I don't," replied the journalist who was conducting the interview.

"Oh, you mean fellow!"

"But the others do, and you can smoke if you wish."

"All we Russian ladies like our cigarette," said H.P.B. "Why, do you know poor Queen Victoria is nearly frightened into fits because her Russian daughter-in-law smokes?"

She brought out her cigarette papers and some Turkish tobacco, and deftly rolled herself an elegant little cigarette. The reporter supplied her with a light, and she blew the smoke through her "beautiful nostrils" with dreamy relish. She had already told them that she was born in 1834 (she was, in fact, born in 1831) at Ekaterinoslav, of which district her father, Colonel Hahn-Hahn, was the Governor; that her mother was a daughter of General Fadeyev, and that she was a granddaughter of Princess Dolgorouky.

"When I was sixteen years of age they married me to Mr. Blavatsky. He was the Governor of Erivan. Fancy! He was seventy-three and I was sixteen. But mind, I don't blame anybody—not my friends, not in the least. (Puff, puff.) However, at the end of the year we separated. His habits were not agreeable to me. As I had a fortune of my own I determined to travel. I went first of all to Egypt. I spent three nights in the pyramid of Cheops. Oh, I had most marvellous experiences. . . ."

She went on to say that, after visiting England and America during 1853 (this, then, was her second visit to the United States), she returned to Russia on account of the death of her grandmother. Then Egypt again and this time she penetrated the Sudan. "I made a great deal of money on that journey."

"How?"

"Why, by buying ostrich feathers. I did not go there for that purpose, but as I found I could do it, I did it. Oh! ostrich feathers that would sell for five or six guineas, you could buy there for a cent. Then I went to Athens, Palestine, Syria, Arabia and back again to Paris and made the acquaintance of Daniel Home, the spiritualist. . . . Home converted me to spiritualism."

Daniel Dunglas Home, whom Charles Dickens called a ruffian and a scoundrel, was the most celebrated spiritualist in the world; he also had a gift for levitation, and for producing other phenomena. This prompted the reporter to ask:

"Did you ever see any of his levitations?"

"Yes; but give me a light. (Puff, puff.) Thanks. Yes, I have seen Home carried out of a four-storey window, let down very gently to the ground and put into his carriage. After this I returned to Russia. . . ."

H.P.B. then spoke a few words about spiritualist phenomena at the Russian court.

"Where did you travel subsequently?" asked the reporter.

"I went to Italy and then to Greece. As I was returning from the Piraeus to Napoli, when we were off Spezzia, the boat in which I was making the voyage, the *Eumonia*, blowed up, and of four hundred persons only seventeen were saved. I was one of the fortunate ones. As I laid on my back I saw limbs, heads, and trunks all falling around me. This was on 21 June, 1871. . . ."

* * *

Dr. Beard did not take up H.P.B.'s challenge and try to win the $500; and two weeks later another, and longer, article by H.P.B. appeared in the *Graphic*. "Every word of his [Dr. Beard's] statement, when it is not a most evident untruth, is a wicked and malicious insinuation built on the very equivocal authority of one witness against the evidence of thousands," she wrote, and thus delivered herself of some of the loathing she felt for him. Dr. Beard had, apparently, tried to grab hold of one of the spirit forms. What, one may wonder, would have happened if he had succeeded?

Franz Hartmann, M.D., a German who was fascinated by everything connected with the occult, retells briefly the sad story of Mrs. Markee, an American medium, at one of whose séances a spirit form was seized by an uninhibited sitter.

The spirit form forced itself free, but Mrs. Markee was found covered in blood in her cabinet, and was still unconscious two years later. This was in the 1870s.

Dr. Hartmann reports a case which happened in his own house in Georgetown, Colorado, on 27 July, 1881.

The medium was a Mrs. N. D. Miller of Denver, Colorado, formerly of Memphis, Tennessee. She and her husband had been invited round by the doctor and his wife. There were two other persons present: a Mr. Cree, a "well-known gentleman of Georgetown", and a powerful woman called Mrs. M. Smith.

The cabinet was formed by a few blankets hung over a frame in a corner of the room.

After the usual physical manifestations had occurred—Dr. Hartmann does not say what they were, but raps on the walls and furniture were undoubtedly heard—thirty or forty materialized forms of all sizes—men, women and children—issued from the cabinet, sometimes two at a time: they talked with the sitters, and took them into the cabinet to examine the medium, Mrs. Miller. Meanwhile the main body of spirit forms walked about outside and, when they felt that they had had enough, dematerialized by sinking through the carpet. As most of the forms were of former local inhabitants, they were recognized. Indeed, one of them, when alive, had promised Mrs. Hartmann to return in just this fashion.

Towards the end of the séance, one of the spirit forms approached Mrs. Smith. Dr. Hartmann explains that this lady had been hired by some unspecified persons to create trouble. She therefore pretended that this spirit form was that of her mother, and with cries of "Oh, my mother! My mother!" she went off into hysterics and seized the spirit form by the wrists.

The company then witnessed the efforts of the spirit to get away from Mrs. Smith; and fearing that this was doing irreparable harm—not to the spirit form but to the groaning medium in the cabinet—they rushed to the rescue.

"Oh, this is my mother. Do not take her away!" yelled Mrs. Smith.

When, says Dr. Hartmann, they took hold of Mrs. Smith's hands, her fingers were clutching the wrists of the spirit form, "but these wrists ended in nothing—there was nobody attached to them".

The spirit form (or what was left of it) was finally released, Mrs. Smith was expelled from the house, and then the unconscious Mrs. Miller was carried out of the cabinet. "No pulse and no heart-beat could be detected," says Dr. Hartmann. But gradually both returned, and the medium regained consciousness and complained of great fatigue and nausea.

Chapter Six

KATIE KING

AFTER seeing about four hundred spirit forms at the Eddys' homestead at Chittenden, the Colonel returned to New York. He was soon being entertained to further séances—table-tipping, spirit rappings, the spelling out of messages and so forth—held by H.P.B. at her lodgings in Irving Place. The messages were in the main from a certain John King, a spirit well known to habitués of mediumistic circles. John King pretended to be the ruler of a tribe of spirits; when incarnate he was the famous seventeenth-century pirate, Henry Morgan.

At the beginning of December, 1874, H.P.B. moved to Philadelphia, where two mediums, Nelson Holmes and his wife, Jennie, had caused a spiritualist scandal and were being denounced in the newspapers. They must have been a great attraction to H.P.B., for it was her mission—or so she said—to defend the cause of spiritualism.

She was drawn to Philadelphia for another reason as well. A certain Michael Betanelly lived there, and he had fallen in love with her. There is no suggestion in any of the relevant documents that she was in love with him, but doubtless she liked him in some ways, and on her arrival in Philadelphia she went and stayed at the boarding-house, in Girard Avenue, where he was staying. She had met him through the Colonel, and Betanelly had met the Colonel after writing to him to say how surprised he was to read, in one of the *Graphic* articles, about Michael Guegidze. Betanelly was also a Georgian and had actually known Guegidze before the latter's unfortunate death in 1869.

The Holmeses seem to have been as gifted as the Eddys, for they, too, could produce the extraordinary phenomenon of materialization. The technique used was the same as that at Chittenden: the medium—either Mr. or Mrs. Holmes—sat in a cabinet, and from the cabinet emerged the materialized forms.

Of the spirits manifested by the Holmeses, by far the most important, and the cause of their undoing, was Katie King, the daughter of John King. Katie was an attractive young woman; and a rich and prominent member of the Holmeses' circle, Robert Dale Owen, became quite infatuated with her. Owen was the son of the famous Robert Owen, the Utopian socialist who had founded in America in 1825 the community of New Harmony.

Robert Dale Owen was now old, but he was almost as famous as his illustrious father; for after the collapse of New Harmony, he had published, in collaboration with Frances Wright, a remarkable woman educationalist and one of the founders of the Utopian community of Nashoba in Tennessee, a paper called the *Free Enquirer* which advocated the revolutionary ideas of free love, female emancipation, birth control and spiritualism. Owen was also the author of a book on birth control called *Moral Physiology*, which created a scandal when it appeared and had a vast sale. He was elected to the State Legislature and then to the Senate.

Frances Wright was interviewed by that remarkable English journalist and traveller, William Hepworth Dixon. He calls her "a clever and excitable woman", and says that she believed the earth was over-populated—hence her advocacy of birth control—and that the marriage laws of the time made a slave of every woman who adopted them. This information is taken from Dixon's *Spiritual Wives*, 1868, a work which was attacked as indecent by the *Pall Mall Gazette*. In the libel action which followed, the author was awarded damages of one farthing.

It is rather surprising that Owen, a confirmed spiritualist, should have thought it fit and proper to give Katie King several items of jewellery which, rather inexplicably, dematerialized with her after the séance. But the good Mr. Owen was neither surprised nor suspicious that his jewellery should have entered, so to speak, into the general economy of Nature; and it seemed, too, quite natural to him that Katie should give him in return a lock of her golden hair which did not dematerialize after he had taken it home. There was some disparity in their ages: Katie was twenty-three; Owen, seventy-three. He called her his daughter, and she called him "father".

John King was also on the scene, and during one particular séance he communicated to Dr. Henry T. Child, a prominent Philadelphian spiritualist, his wish to write, or rather dictate, his autobiography. As King had been Sir Henry Morgan, the Lieutenant-Governor of Jamaica, as well as a buccaneer, this suggestion aroused considerable interest, and Dr. Child readily agreed to be his amanuensis.

While Dr. Child was taking down the details of the extraordinary and fascinating life of Sir Henry, a certain W. C. Leslie, a railway contractor by profession and a spiritualist in his spare time, called with tears in his eyes on the aged Robert Dale Owen, and said, "Oh, dear, this is an awful business."

"What is it?" anxiously demanded Owen.

"In the lowest manner we've been taken in. I hardly dare tell you." He paused, then blurted out, "Katie King is *not* a spirit, but a live woman."

"But that's impossible!" exclaimed Owen indignantly. "I've grown to love her so. She's such a wonderful person. She can't take me in. That is all a vile slander on my dear daughter."

To love a spirit form was one thing, a live woman, another.

Leslie shook his head, and produced some of the presents which Owen had given to this daughter of his.

Owen looked at them in astonishment, picked them up, felt them: they were certainly not dematerialized.

He collapsed, murmuring, "I was so fond of her; she is so charming."

Mr. Leslie mentioned the name of the woman who had been impersonating Katie—a Mrs. Eliza White. He had called on the Holmeses, and Mrs. White had answered the door and told him that Mr. and Mrs. Holmes had gone for a holiday to Blissfield, Michigan. Something in her general appearance had made him suspicious. Seeing that he suspected that she was Katie, she shuddered.

Mr. Leslie began to question her, and Mrs. White answered him with lies. In the end, she broke down and confessed.

Mr. Owen grew so vexed at these revelations that he fell ill. However, when he had recovered, he arranged for Mrs. White to put on a performance of her impersonations of Katie and show just how she had done it. She did so very effectively. Moreover, she wrote down a message for Mr. Owen in handwriting which seemed identical with the handwriting of the several notes "Katie" had written to him. Owen was convinced, and with a heavy heart he published in *The Banner of Light*, a journal devoted to spiritualism, a statement in which he withdrew his confidence in these two mediums.

This produced, of course, an excellent story for the newspapers. The Colonel felt himself challenged; he sat down and wrote to Robert Dale Owen that if Mr. and Mrs. Holmes would agree to submit their mediumship to proof, and place themselves under such test conditions as he would prescribe, he would come at once to Philadelphia. By return post Mr. Owen wrote, "I am rejoiced at your proposal, and shall always hold myself your debtor for having made it." Owen, it should be pointed out, had not lost faith in spiritualism as such, only in the Holmeses, and not even in them entirely. They had, he believed, deceived him by "supplementing the genuine with the spurious": that was all. As an additional punishment, he intended to cut them out of his next book on spiritualism.

Owen was prepared to reserve his final judgment until the Colonel had made his investigation; but Dr. Henry T. Child had already made up his mind that the Holmeses were frauds, and in protest he resigned his position as President of the Spiritualist Association of Philadelphia.

On 9 and 11 January, Eliza White, calling herself "Katie King", published her life story in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. As

Katie King her life had been one big lie, but, to ensure that she wasn't telling any more lies, she had sworn under oath that this, her autobiography, was true, and that Dr. Child had endorsed it.

This was a great blow to spiritualism, and to Madame Blavatsky's hopes. In a letter to Aksakov, she called Dr. Child the spiritist Anti-Christ, and said that by this act he had destroyed spiritualism. In a letter to Professor Hiram Corson of Cornell University, whose acquaintance she had recently made, she expressed her dislike in more homely terms by saying that Child ought to be horsewhipped.

Eliza described the mediumship of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes as a gross misrepresentation, the pretended materializations being entirely fictitious and effected through the agency of masks. The locks of hair, which she gave to various persons, were cut from a wig she was wearing. As for the photograph sold by Dr. Child as the authentic portrait of Katie King, it was (she confessed) her own portrait.

The Colonel arrived in Philadelphia on 4 January, 1875, and joined H.P.B. at her boarding-house at 1111 Girard Avenue. He began his investigations with the same vigour and circumspection with which he had investigated charges of corruption for the United States Government, and earned their commendation. Eliza White had started all the trouble. He began by inquiring into her life and character.

He found that her name was Eliza Frances White, née Potter, "but she is said to have passed under a number of aliases at various times". She was born in Lee, Massachusetts, "apparently long before the date sworn in her pretended autobiography". Her father, who is described as a stone-cutter, had moved to Canton, Connecticut. When he died there, some years later, he left his wife and family penniless; but they were taken care of by a certain Wilson B. White, commonly known as "Bub". Mr. White's attitude was not apparently motivated by charity alone, for in due course Eliza bore him a son. She lived with Mr. White for ten or twelve years, but, comments the Colonel, "I have been unable to ascertain whether they were married". During the Civil War, Mr. White enlisted in the 19th Connecticut Volunteers. What happened to him afterwards, the Colonel does not say: the story tails off with the remark that, after Mr. White's regiment had been ordered to the front, Eliza "abandoned herself to a life of immorality in Alexandria".

These details are given in "The Katie King Affair", which is an appendix in smaller type to *People from the Other World.*

Madame Blavatsky is described in the same work in terms more flattering than ever. She is one of the most remarkable mediums in the world. Furthermore, her mediumship is totally different from that of any other person the Colonel has ever met; for instead of being controlled by the spirits to do their will, she controls them and makes them do hers. This extraordinary power she acquired during her many travels in oriental lands. Upon her bosom she wears "the mystic jewelled emblem of an Eastern Brotherhood". She is probably the only representative in America of the secret fraternity who "boasted of secrets of which the Philosopher's Stone was but the least; who considered themselves the heirs of all that the Chaldeans, the Magi, the Gymnosophists, and the Platonists had taught".* Finally, the Colonel makes the surprising confession that he is not sure if Madame de B. has been admitted behind the veil or not, "for she is very reticent upon the subject, but her startling gifts seem impossible of explanation upon any other hypothesis".

He was quite serious. The "veil" was not all that difficult to penetrate. At Chittenden he had seen crowds who had returned from the undiscovered country.

The preliminary inquiry into the Katie King affair was also conducted on the spirit plane. This was not difficult, for John King, Katie's father, could tell them all they needed to know about Mrs. Eliza White who had so defamed his daughter.

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*These high-flown phrases are borrowed by the Colonel from Bulwer-Lytton's description of Zanoni, 1842.

The Colonel describes John King as the busiest spirit in modern spiritualist circles. He didn't know who King really was, but he had read a great deal about him—of his materializations, his audible speaking, direct writing and feats of legerdemain, not only in America during the past twenty years or so, but in England, France, Germany, and elsewhere too. The Colonel himself had met him in London in 1870; H.P.B. had encountered him in 1860. This ubiquitous spirit could speak fluently in a variety of languages, including Georgian and Latin.

The Colonel says that he went to Philadelphia with an open mind; he had no theories about the matter. As the newspaper reports were confused, he decided to dismiss them entirely, and build the whole case afresh.

Firstly, he must have proof of John King's supersensual existence. Thus, during a séance on 6 January, 1875, in Madame de B.'s bedroom, when John King had been successfully evoked, he challenged him in these words: "If you are in reality a spirit, as you pretend, give me some exhibition of your power. Make me, for example, a copy of the last note from Eliza White to Mr. —— that I have in the portfolio in my pocket."

John King did not reply to this, but rattled on about other matters. Two days later, however, as the Colonel and H.P.B. were sitting on opposite sides of a table, she writing, he reading, "John rapped loudly for the alphabet, and spelt out, 'Hand me your dictionary, under the table, will you?' Mme. de B. did as requested. 'The mucilage.' She passed that down also. All was quiet for a moment, when he rapped that we should look. We took up the dictionary and lo! upon a fly-leaf in the back part, we found an exact copy of the note I had referred to two evenings before. The portfolio in which I carried it, with other documents relating to the case, I had taken out of my pocket a half-hour before, and laid upon the mantelshelf. With this exception, it had not been out of my possession, and the whole time it lay on the mantel, it was under my eye and I sat within a few feet of it. It was impossible, therefore, for any trickster to have secretly transferred a duplicate to my friend's dictionary."

John King promised to do better the following day.

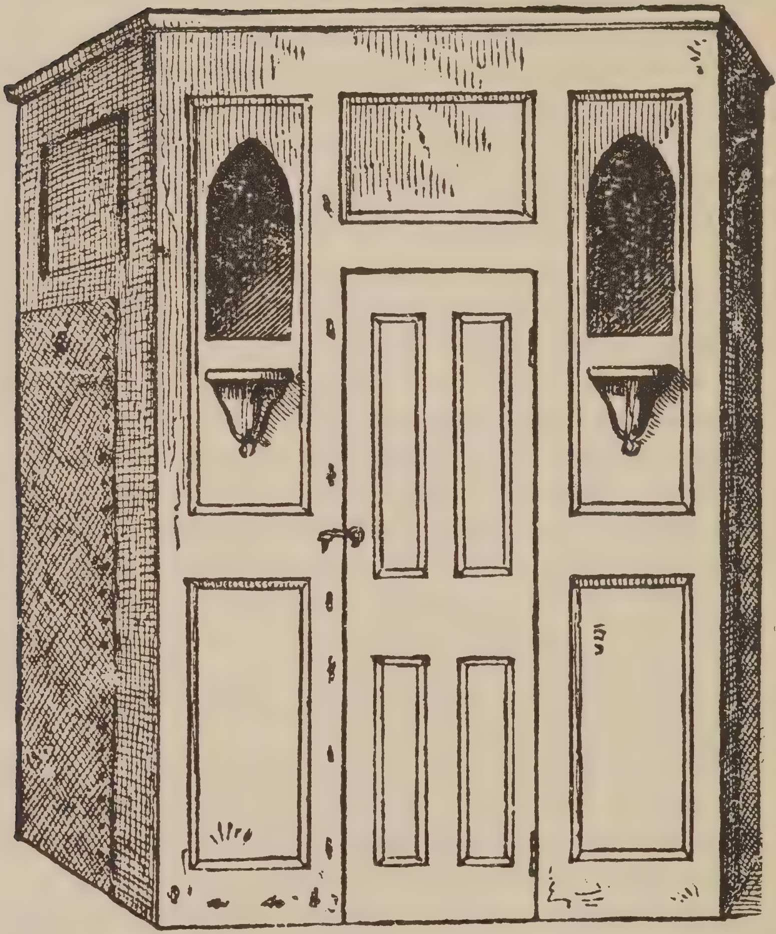
On 11 January Mrs. Holmes returned from her holiday, and on the evening of the same day the Colonel attended a séance at her home. It was a dark séance; there were fifteen persons present. The cabinet, of triangular shape, was built like a cupboard, and was placed at the end of the room. A door admitted the medium, and two high-up apertures on either side were for the materializations. After Mrs. Holmes had gone inside it, and bolted the door, someone started playing a large music-box.

In a few minutes the short black curtain behind one of the apertures was drawn aside, and a man's head appeared, as if floating in the air. The Colonel went up to the cabinet, leant his arm on the bracket and gazed into the face which was no more than twelve inches away. "A more dreadful sight I had never beheld," he wrote. "The lower portions, including the wavy silky beard, were perfectly formed, as also was the brow; but the eyes were not materialized, and the cavities they should have filled were edged with ragged rims, as though the face had been made of wax and the eyes melted out by the application of a red-hot iron."

The Colonel made several polite remarks to this apparition, and the lips, which were adequately materialized, smiled in reply. Then a well-formed hand came up and stroked the spirit's beard. The Colonel put his hand inside the aperture to feel the beard for himself: he found it soft and warm, but he was not entirely satisfied with the movements of the head.

The next morning he called on Mrs. Holmes with a capacious bag made of stout unbleached sheeting; it had a drawstring at its mouth, and was large enough to contain her.

That evening Mrs. Holmes was invited to step into the bag; she did so, and the Colonel drew the mouth tightly round her neck. She entered the cabinet, from which the Colonel had



The Cabinet

removed the chair, and it was immediately bolted on the inside—by whom one can only try to guess, for Mrs. Holmes's hands were imprisoned within the bag. After a few minutes, a partly-materialized female face appeared at one of the apertures. "I could not think of anything to compare it with except the face of a corpse, half-eaten by rats or crabs," wrote the Colonel.

On the evening of 13 January, John King showed himself very clearly in one or the other of the two apertures of the cabinet: he came forward as often as twenty times, and he obligingly allowed several people to stroke his beard. His eyes were perfectly formed, and he used them to good purpose by winking at the Colonel.

Katie also appeared, and the Colonel asked her if she would communicate with him by writing: by this means he hoped to prove that Mrs. White had forged Katie's handwriting.

"I'll do it, Colonel, if I can get power enough," replied Katie.

The Colonel then passed to her a sheet of paper on which he had written something.

The next day the Colonel held a séance in his own rooms, a cabinet being improvised out of a short passage between the bedroom and the sitting-room and some muslin curtaining with holes cut in it. Madame de Blavatsky, Robert Dale Owen, Mr. Betanelly, and a certain Dr. Fellger, who believed the materializations to be genuine, were present, in addition to the Colonel and the medium. To Mr. Owen's satisfaction, John King appeared, and a voice, supposedly Katie's, spoke. Later, the owner of the voice even patted Mr. Owen's hand.

The Colonel asked the spirit form if she had written something for him yet, and she replied that she had not. He then asked her for the piece of paper, so he could show it to Mr. Owen. In a moment it was thrust through the aperture. Mr. Owen examined it: there was no writing on it except what the Colonel had written in French. It was handed back to the spirit form.

Of this séance, the Colonel wrote that the manifestations proved beyond question that, whatever they may be, they did not depend for their production either on false panels or trap-doors or wire machinery or any other cheating device.

This was a private séance. A public one was held on the evening of the same day. One of the gentlemen present suggested that, in addition to putting Mrs. Holmes into the bag, her hands should be tied behind her back, but the Colonel thought this unnecessary.

John King appeared as usual and allowed several persons to shake his hand. As the Colonel saw his head floating in the aperture, he remembered Mrs. White's accusation that it was only a ten-cent mask manipulated by the medium, so he asked permission to put his arm inside and sweep "the air in a semi-circle beneath the head". Permission was granted; he put his hand inside the aperture, but came in contact with no part of any mechanical device. The smiling head of John King continued to float imperturbably in the air.

Later, the voice of Katie called the Colonel. He left his seat and went up to the cabinet, and a fully materialized hand passed out to him the sheet of paper he had handed in a few hours before. It now contained two communications: one from Katie and a very brief one from her father. Whatever one may say of Katie, she hadn't an educated handwriting. Neither—from a graphological point of view—did her handwriting reveal a pleasant, open character. On the contrary. But this is, of course, irrelevant. The reality of Katie as a spirit form was the only point to be established, nothing more.

The Colonel had written on the piece of paper: *Si vous êtes un véritable esprit, écrivez, autour de cette carte, quelques sentiments d'amitié et signez votre nom.* [If you are a genuine spirit, write something pleasant on this piece of paper and sign your name.]

H. S. Olcott

To which Katie had replied:

Je suis très faible, frère Olcott [I am very weak, brother

Olcott], any further test would weaken too much the suffering medium and exhaust her. Poor dear father Owen, he must know who loves him.

Katie King

I pray God to bless and help the Spiritualists for ever and ever.

Your ever faithful
Katie King

Bully for you Olcott, you do make us sweat

J K

John King wrote each letter separately in a so-called print style, somewhat shaky, and quite unlike seventeenth-century script; still it is a wonder he was able to write at all. His daughter's handwriting was a typical Victorian script.

The Colonel was still dissatisfied. Katie King had spoken to him and even written to him, but she had not materialized before his eyes. He had seen only her hand, and that was not enough. On the evening of 19 January he introduced further test conditions: he attached to the left-hand aperture of the cabinet from the inside a cage or basket of wire, which was like the receptacle for letters attached to the inside of a door; and when the medium was inside the bag he sealed the strings of the mouth with sealing-wax. Now there was no possibility of her getting her hands free and waving ten-cent masks in the air; and even if she could get her hands out of the bag, no mask would be able to penetrate the wire mesh covering the inside of the aperture.

The Colonel expressed surprise that in spite of these hindrances the manifestations continued to appear. Like a confirmed sceptic, he asked himself, How does it happen? There were two guitars hanging up inside the cabinet, and as soon as the medium, clad in her bag, had toddled into the cabinet, they were played simultaneously, and one of the guitars was even thrust out of the aperture.

On 20 January another séance was held. The Colonel described it as very unsatisfactory. Both Mr. and Mrs. Holmes, unencumbered by any bag, entered the cabinet at the same time. "I fancied I heard them working at my wire cage as if trying to effect an opening," the Colonel wrote, "but they did not succeed, and beyond the drawing of the curtain aside [i.e. the black curtain covering the aperture] nothing occurred. At the other aperture John King showed himself, and also a female face, purporting to be Katie's, but not satisfactorily identified."

Before he could say that his researches had been successful, he must see Katie for himself, and compare her with her photograph which he possessed. This photograph, described as the Holmes photograph, bore no resemblance whatsoever to Mrs. White.

The Colonel left no stone unturned. He consulted two jugglers, one of whom, called Harding, was famous as a maker of mechanical tricks for jugglers. He was introduced to the Colonel by "Mr. Coleman Sellers, the distinguished engineer". Upon examining the wire cage, Harding pointed out one spot which he thought loose enough for a hand to squeeze through and wave a mask. The Colonel had this loose portion promptly hammered down with staples.

On 21 January he consulted another juggler called Yost, who was also a dealer in jugglers' apparatus. Mr. Yost explained to the Colonel how he thought Mrs. Holmes got her hands out of the bag and worked artificial faces. But the Colonel was unconvinced.

There were several more séances at which the usual sort of phenomena occurred. The medium entered the cabinet in a sack, the door was closed behind her by the Colonel, and immediately was heard the sound of the bolt inside being slammed home. Who was in there to do this? Obviously not the medium. Either a confederate or a spirit. The Colonel's description of the cabinet removes all possibility of a confederate having got in through a false door. Ergo, some materialized spirit must have shot the bolt home. In his account of one of the séances, the Colonel says, "I then closed the door, which as usual was bolted on the inside by somebody whose hands were *not* sealed up in a bag, and before I could turn down the gas. . . ." So the séances were dark séances, everything was happening in the dark.

Alexandra David-Neel, the Tibetan scholar and explorer, had this European type of séance in mind when she wrote in her *With Mystics and Magicians in Tibet*:

> "Phantoms, as Tibetans describe them, and those that I have myself seen do not resemble the apparitions which are said to occur during spiritualist séances. In Tibet, the witnesses of these phenomena have not been specially invited to endeavour to produce them, or to meet a medium known for producing them. Consequently, their minds are not prepared and intent on seeing apparitions. There is no table upon which the company lay their hands nor any medium in a trance, nor a dark closet in which the latter is shut up. Darkness is not required, sun and open air do not keep away the phantoms."

The Colonel was growing impatient to depart. At one of these last evening séances he had seen a woman's face which he recognized more or less as Katie's. "I scrutinized it very closely. The face was not smooth and well rounded, but seemingly roughly finished. The eyebrows were straight and black; the contour of face oval, rather long and thin; the dark hair lay smooth upon the brow. A gauzy white material, wrapped around it, framed the head, and made it look unnatural and ghastly."

The next day, this same woman appeared and cut off a lock of her hair which was later compared with the locks of hair in Mr. Owen's possession and found to be identical in texture and colour—"a peculiar glorious shade of golden brown".

On the evening of 2 February the Colonel held a circle at his lodgings. Nine persons were present, including the two mediums. Mrs. Holmes was put into the bag, and her husband sat with the rest of the audience outside the cabinet. John King showed himself very clearly, called to Mr. Betanelly and spoke to him in Georgian, his own language. Katie then appeared, and the Colonel thrust his hand through the aperture and touched her. This was a light séance. It was thought satisfactory, so the Colonel called for a dark séance. Everyone, including the medium, sat in a circle, with hands joined; the light was turned out. Ghostly hands touched them all. "At Mme. de B.'s order, some beautiful lights danced in the air over her head and then disappeared."

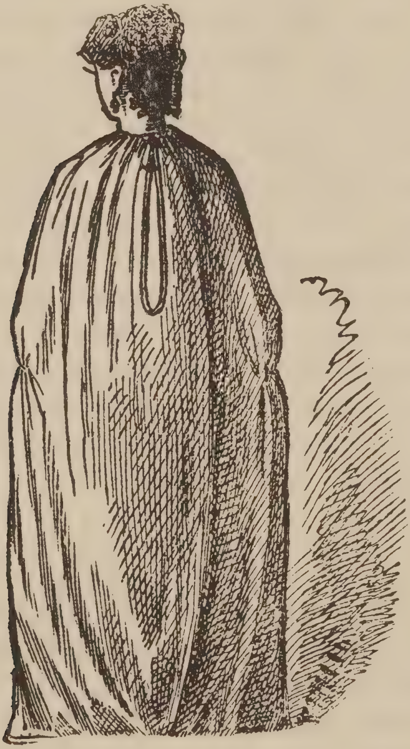
But the Colonel was still not entirely satisfied. The next evening the last test séance was held, and to it Madame Blavatsky brought her wonderful power—thus the Colonel describes it. There were only six persons present beside the two mediums. "After taking the usual precautions against fraud (including a strange exercise of Mme. de B.'s power, which threw Mrs. Holmes into a death-like trance) the light was dimmed." Firstly, raps were heard all over the cabinet, various voices addressed the audience and a detached hand clutching a bell came right out of the aperture and slid slowly down the front of the cabinet. The hand rang the bell and then disappeared with it.

Suddenly the sound of the bolt being drawn back was heard, and in breathless silence the company watched the door opening. The rest is best told in the Colonel's own words.

"I sat within a few feet of the entrance, and plainly saw at the threshold a short, thin, girlish figure, clad in white from crown to sole. She stood there motionless for an instant, and then slowly stepped forward a pace or two. By the obscure light we could see that she was shorter and much more delicately built than the medium, and her dress with its trailing skirt, and the long veil that completely enveloped her form, were as though just from the hands of the *modiste*. Who she was or what she was, I do not know, but one thing I do know—she was not Jennie Holmes, nor any puppet or confederate of hers. And I know, further, that Mme. de B., who sat next to me, uttered one word in a strange tongue, and the spectre immediately withdrew as noiselessly as she had entered."

When the meeting broke up after this extraordinary event, Mrs. Holmes was found in a deep cataleptic trance, and not even the efforts of Dr. Fellger could revive her.

This vindication of the Holmeses and of Katie King concludes Colonel Olcott's *People from the Other World*. He invited the reader to digest the facts and form his own views. Unfortunately, Robert Dale Owen was unable to digest the facts, and he died soon afterwards in a lunatic asylum.



Mrs. Holmes secured

Chapter Seven

SECRET BROTHERS

It has been suggested that H.P.B. and Betanelly were sleeping together in their boarding-house at 1111 Girard Avenue. It is only conjecture and, as we have seen from H.P.B.'s letter to Aksakov, she had abjured her loose way of living.

When at the beginning (page 6) of the first volume of his *Old Diary Leaves* the Colonel introduces Madame Blavatsky, he takes pains to point out her sexlessness; but fifty pages further on he has to record her marriage to Betanelly. He is anxious to make as little as possible of it, not because it contradicts, by implication, his views on her feminine charms, but because Madame Blavatsky was a woman dedicated to a high purpose, from which marriage was a gross detraction. Moreover, her virginity had to be preserved at all cost, for virgins, in the language of initiation, have a greater potential than non-virgins, a greater magnetism, and Madame Blavatsky's magnetism was exceedingly great—how else could she control the spirits from the other world?

The fact that she is Madame—and not Mademoiselle—Blavatsky did not matter, for she had married, when only just seventeen, a man whose advanced age hardly permitted him to enjoy the privileges of marriage; and he had not, in fact, done so. She was, therefore, a virgin when she married for this second time a man whose age—he was much younger than she was—precluded any likelihood of his having the same disability. But Madame Blavatsky wasn't intending, for reasons of love or for any other reasons, to curtail her magical career. This marriage to Michael Betanelly wasn't at all what it seemed. Betanelly had threatened to commit suicide unless she agreed to be his wife. That was the simple truth, or so she tells us. Betanelly declared, she says, that he asked for nothing except the privilege of watching over her, and that towards her he had only unselfish devotion. On the express condition, then, that they would not share the same bed, H.P.B. at last agreed; and they were married some time in March, 1875, by a Unitarian minister, and set up house at 3420 Sansom Street, Philadelphia.

Colonel Olcott was not present at the ceremony, but he met them on their return from the clergyman's residence after the celebration of the rite.

Research among the registers revealed that she had given her age as thirty-six, instead of forty-three, but no one will blame her for this. One might, however, blame her for marrying Betanelly while Blavatsky, way back home in Russia, was still alive and she was undivorced from him. Still, as she hadn't seen him for years, one can forgive her, and explain her conduct as due to a lapse of memory.

Wrote the Colonel: "When I privately expressed to her my amazement at what I conceived to be her act of folly in marrying a man younger than herself, and inexpressibly her inferior in mental capacity; one, moreover, who could never be even an agreeable companion to her, and with very little means—his mercantile business not being as yet established—she said it was a misfortune that she could not escape. Her fate and his were temporarily linked together by an inexorable Karma, and the union was to her in the nature of a punishment for her awful pride and combativeness, which impeded her spiritual evolution, while no lasting harm would result to the young man. The inevitable result was that this ill-starred couple dwelt together but a few months. The husband forgot his vows of unselfishness, and, to her ineffable disgust, became an importunate lover."

The Colonel does not say why Madame Blavatsky should have been ineffably disgusted, and we have to turn to A. L. Rawson's account of her for the answer. He tells us that she cared very little for men's admiration of her as a woman, and quotes her own expressive words on the subject:

"To Hades with this sex love! It is a beastly appetite that should be starved into submission."

The flattering references to her in the Colonel's articles in the *Graphic*, the write-ups in the same paper and in the *Sun* (which called her Madame Blowtskey), and her own articles in *The Banner of Light*, all suddenly combined to establish Madame Blavatsky as an unusual personality. In other words, she had arrived. But she was anticipating the future a little when she wrote to Aksakov on 24 March, 1875, "Not a day passes without some new sensation about me in the newspapers: Blavatsky was in Africa, and went up with Livingstone in a balloon; Blavatsky dined with the King of the Sandwich Islands; Blavatsky converted the Pope to spiritualism, she foretold Napoleon III's death to him, she cured the Queen of Spain's face of warts by the aid of the spirits, and so on and so forth. Lord, what don't they write about me!"

During March, 1875, the Colonel's *People from the Other World* appeared. H.P.B. said that it created "an enormous furore". It may have done, but the book did not sell, and H.P.B.'s début in America as a medium of unrivalled ability coincided with a rapid decline of interest in the subject. Robert Dale Owen's announcement to the press that he had been grossly deceived by the Holmeses for years was the cause of it all. In a letter to Aksakov, of 24 May, H.P.B. paints the other side of the picture. The Colonel, she said, was sitting on heaps of his *People from the Other World* like Marius on the ruins of Carthage, and thinking "a bitter thought". Subscribers to *The Banner of Light*, the main spiritualist journal, had fallen from 25,000 to 12,000; and the famous spiritualist writer, Epes Sargent, was lighting his stove with his latest work, *Proof Palpable of Immortality*.

This was an unexpected setback. Where, one might ask, were the eighteen million American spiritualists about whom H.P.B. had written to Aksakov? Robert Dale Owen, surely,

Alfred Percy Sinnett, author of *The Occult World*. He helped to build up the Theosophical Society

An early photograph of Madame Blavatsky, probably taken soon after her initiation in Tibet had not dispersed them all? The situation suggests that spiritualism had not got an unlimited appeal, and that it had been taken up by the public in general only because it was the latest craze. Whatever the reason, it made the Colonel and H.P.B. put their heads together to think out other lines of development. The Miracle Club, a club at which all kinds of wonders would be performed, was the Colonel's suggestion: H.P.B., at any rate, gave him the credit for it.

* * *

The Miracle Club was not a success, probably because it contained nothing new—just the usual table-tipping and evocation of spirits. To perform these feats in private, and even under the vow of secrecy, was not enough; it was only the same old business and it led nowhere in particular.

A new idea had occurred to Madame Blavatsky; in fact it had been with her for a long time, struggling, as it were, to break through into consciousness or, perhaps, to find the right circumstances for its application. We first read of this new idea in her account of John King, whom she had known for fourteen years. Now, John King was a spirit, earth-haunting in his habits, of a deceased person, one who had lived a swashbuckling existence during the reign of Charles II. Madame Blavatsky, alone of mediums who had come across him, had made a kind of Guardian Angel out of him.

In a letter to Aksakov, dated 12 April, 1875, she writes: ". . . the spirit of John King is very fond of me, and I am fonder of him than of anything on earth. He is my only friend, and if I am indebted to any one for the radical change in my ideas of life, my strivings and so on, it is to him alone. He has transformed me, and I shall be indebted to him, when I 'go to the garret', for not having to dwell for whole centuries, it may be, in darkness and gloom. John and I are acquainted from old times, long before he began to materialize in London and take walks in the medium's house with a lamp in his hand."

Elsewhere she described him as "a messenger of the Adepts".

An Adept is one who has attained the alchemical secret; in other words, a Magus, like Apollonius of Tyana, to whom several miracles are ascribed.

One of the Adepts seems to have been a certain Tuitit Bey, of the Brotherhood of Luxor. Without any warning, he sent a letter to Colonel Olcott. He did not send it through the post, but by more immediate means known as "precipitation". Suddenly the epistle is precipitated into the house, and is seen falling on to the table or is found under the pillow or high up (or low down) on a piece of furniture. The communication from Tuitit Bey, the first of its kind, came by way of Madame Blavatsky, who read it and added a covering note.

"I dared withhold for a few hours the letter sent you by Tuitit Bey, for I alone am answerable for the effects and results of my Chief's orders. . . . The message was ordered at Luxor a little after midnight between Monday and Tuesday. Written out at Ellora in the dawn by one of the neophytes and written very badly. I wanted to ascertain from Tuitit Bey if it was still his wish to have it sent in such a state of human scribbling, as it was intended for one who received such a thing for the first time. My suggestion was to let you have one of our parchments on which the contents appear *whenever you cast your eyes on it to read it, and disappear every time as soon as you have done*."

H.P.B. had suggested the use of magical parchment because she knew that the Colonel was fed up with John King's tricks and that his faith needed refreshing "by some more substantial proof". To this, Tuitit Bey had replied: "A mind that seeks the proofs of Wisdom and Knowledge in outward appearance as material proofs is unworthy of being let in unto the grand secrets of the 'Book of Holy Sophia'."

After urging the Colonel to "try", she went on to describe her own previous difficulties in connexion with instructions from these Adepts, Brothers, Masters, Superior Beings—call them what you will. What a curse the word *try* had been to her! She had trembled at the thought of misunderstanding the Brothers' orders, of carrying them too far or not far enough.

"Beware, Henry, before you pitch headlong into it. . . . There is still time to decline the connexion. But if you keep the letter I send you and agree to the word Neophyte, you are cooked, my boy. . . ."

The Colonel was not a timid man, and to him this warning was more of an encouragement than anything else. He was eagerly waiting to be "cooked". The last thing people want is to be left alone, uncooked, with all the boredom of their lives to contend with. If they manage to reach the brink of unknown and mysterious things, they would be very faint-hearted indeed—or very wise—not to plunge in and be cooked by the divine flame all the way through.

Madame Blavatsky continued: "Trials and temptations to your faith will shower on you first of all. Remember *my* seven years' preliminary initiation, trials, dangers and fighting with all the incarnated Evils and legions of Devils, and think before you accept."

Seven is the number of the planets of old, and the highest stage in the language of initiation.

Her epistle concluded with an exhortation to patience, faith, no questioning, and *silence*.

The actual communication from the Brothers of Luxor, "Section the Vth", urged the Colonel to trust their servant Helen. It also contained an admonition of "our good brother, John [King]", who had acted rashly but meant well, and an announcement that Dr. Child was going to receive "an opprobrious punishment". This peculiar communication from the Brothers was signed by three of them, Serapis Bey, Polydorus Isurenus, and Robert More, who belonged to the Ellora, the Solomon and the Zoroaster sections of the Brotherhood respectively.

Madame Blavatsky's immediate problem was how to get the Brotherhood known. *The Banner of Light* wouldn't help because the last article she had sent them had been returned with a mere rejection slip, which she described indignantly to Professor Corson as a dirty printed slip of paper.

There was the *Spiritual Scientist*. The editor of this small, recently-founded journal devoted to spiritualism, Elbridge Gerry Brown, had written to Madame Blavatsky after reading her long and angry replies to Dr. Beard, and had invited her to call at his office. After examining several back-numbers of the *Spiritual Scientist*, H.P.B. did so, and found that Mr. Brown was only a young man, well educated and "as poor as poverty". He'd given up everything for spiritualism, quarrelled with his family, spent all his money. Soon the Colonel, under orders from John King, raised $500 for the *Spiritual Scientist*, and then H.P.B.'s lengthy articles began to appear in its pages.

For the issue of 17 April, 1875, Brown wrote this editorial:

> A MESSAGE FROM LUXOR
>
> The readers of the *Scientist* will be no more surprised to read the circular which appears on our front page than we were to receive the same by post. . . . Who may be our unknown friends of the "Committee of Seven" we do not know, nor who the "Brotherhood of Luxor"; but we do know that we are most thankful for this proof of their interest, and shall try to deserve its continuance. Can anyone tell us of such a fraternity as the above? And what Luxor is meant?

Brown went on to say that it was about time some transcendental powers, whether Secret Brothers or Secret Sisters, came to their aid; for after twenty-five years of manifestations, phenomena, materializations, they were all still very much in the dark. This is a reference to the rappings—produced, it was thought, and may still be thought, by the spirits of the departed in their frantic attempts to communicate with the living—heard in Rochester in the State of New York in 1848. Two sisters, Kate and Maggie Fox, were the first to hear these rappings; and they went on hearing them for a long time, until they confessed, according to one anti-spiritualist report, that the mysterious sounds which followed them about were nothing more than the cracking of their own toes in their boots.

The "circular" which appeared on the front page of the

Spiritual Scientist was written by the Colonel. In it he lamented the deplorable state into which spiritualism had recently fallen, and then broke the happy news that the Brothers of Luxor had decided to help them and, as a first move in this direction, had selected the *Spiritual Scientist* as their organ. Signed: For the Committee of Seven. Brotherhood of Luxor.

It was H.P.B. who raised another $500 for the journal, not the Brothers. However, the Brothers continued to give their encouragement and moral support to the alliance of H.P.B. and Gerry Brown. As the Master Serapis wrote to the Colonel, "Try to see him [Brown] alone and devote most of your time to him; on him depends the success of the spiritual movement, and the happiness and welfare of all of you." Unhappily—or, as it turned out, happily—the *Spiritual Scientist* required more money still, and as neither H.P.B. nor the Colonel could produce it, Gerry Brown selfishly declined to publish any more of H.P.B.'s long articles. It is fairly clear that Gerry Brown was only making use of H.P.B., and when he thought she could no longer serve his purpose, he broke with her. Thus this young man, of whom the Brothers of Luxor had expected much, failed in his ascent towards Adeptship.

Serapis, having once started to write to the Colonel, continued to do so at fairly regular intervals. Most of his letters were about H.P.B. "She must have the best intellects of the country introduced to her. Lose not a day, *try* to settle her and begin your new fruitful lives together. Work hand in hand, fear not the immoral man [Betanelly] who claims her. She must be honoured and respected and sought by many whom she can instruct. *Try* to dissipate her gloom, her apprehensions for the future, for they interfere sadly with her spiritual perceptions. The germs will grow, Brother mine, and you will be astonished."

In July the Colonel, equipped with his vast linen bags and sealing-wax for mediums, went off to Boston as a correspondent of the New York *Sun* to investigate the capacities of a Mrs. Mary Baker Thayer. He took H.P.B. with him as his assistant, and they stayed at the luxurious home of Mrs. Charles Houghton, wife of a well-known Boston lawyer. Mrs. Thayer was a "flower medium", that is to say a medium upon whom, when entranced, showers of flowers, leaves, grass, and even branches freshly torn from trees would descend. She was a middle-aged woman who drank—"to make up for the terrible drain of the phenomena upon her nervous power". The Colonel was convinced that she was a genuine medium, and only once did he catch her cheating.

The procedure was this: after the company had assembled, a trustworthy visitor was asked to examine the room and furniture, to fasten and, if he liked, seal the windows and lock the doors. The medium would agree to be searched, to see if she were not concealing any flowers under her voluminous skirts. "She permitted me," said the Colonel, "to do this whenever I liked and willingly suffered me to tie and seal her up in a bag."

Then the company, including the medium, would sit round a large table and join hands. The light would be put out and, in complete darkness and breathless expectation, flowers would descend. And not only flowers. Sometimes when the lights were put on a butterfly or a bird would be found flying about in a corner of the room; there might, too, even be a goldfish flopping about on the table, as if just taken from the water. At Mrs. Thayer's séances one had only to concentrate hard on the mental image of a particular plant to find it on the table when the light was put on again.

"One afternoon," wrote the Colonel, "I visited Forest Hills Cemetery, situated in a suburb of Boston, and, passing through the greenhouses, my attention was struck by a curious plant with long, narrow leaves, striped with white and pale green, known in botany as the *Dracaena Regina*. With my blue pencil I drew underneath one of the leaves the six-pointed star and mentally asked the spirits to bring it to me in Mrs. Thayer's next circle, on the following evening. On that occasion I sat beside her and held her hands to make sure of her good faith. In the dark, I felt some cool and moist object drop upon one of my hands which, when the room was again lit up, proved to be my marked *Dracaena* leaf! To make assurance doubly sure, I revisited the greenhouse and found that my leaf had actually been detached from the stalk and the one I had in my pocket fitted the fracture! A number of similar facts, which I lack space to mention even cursorily, convinced me that Mrs. Thayer was a real psychic."

The Colonel's habit of holding her hands during the séances brought additional confirmatory evidence of her powers, for at the climax of the ceremony, in the pitch-dark room, when the plants began to patter on to the polished table-top, he felt her shudder, and her hands turn deathly cold "as though a flush of iced water had run through her veins". The next moment her hands would resume their normal temperature. This was the indubitable proof: when Madame Blavatsky evoked the full-length spirit form of Katie King from Mrs. Holmes's cabinet, her hands had clutched the Colonel's, and, at the height of the operation, had grown icy cold.

In all the Colonel identified eighty-four different species of plants during Mrs. Thayer's remarkable horticultural séances.

Chapter Eight

BIRTH OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

In August, after Mrs. Thayer had been thoroughly investigated, the Colonel and H.P.B. returned to New York. Where the Colonel went to in New York, no one has said; it was not, presumably, to his wife and three sons, for, since meeting H.P.B., he had seen progressively less of them. He probably returned to the room which, before he left for Boston, Serapis had urged him not to give up: "Keep your room, you may feel me there every time your thoughts will be upon me and when you need me."

Madame Blavatsky returned to Irving Place, but not to her cramped lodgings at number 16. Serapis had urged the Colonel to "find for her a suitable apartment"; he did so at number 46 Irving Place. Serapis had also urged him not to let one day pass without seeing her. As his club—the Lotus Club—was only a few doors away from number 46, this was not so difficult. "Watch over her," wrote Serapis to the Colonel, "and let her not come to harm, our dear Sister who is so careless and thoughtless for herself." In an earlier epistle Serapis had told him that his sons would be provided for, and that he had nothing to worry about on that score. He should fear nothing, devote himself to the main object, and let the future take care of itself.

It was not yet made clear, either by the Brothers of Luxor, or by anyone else, what the main object was. But Serapis need not have worried about the Colonel's constancy. H.P.B. was too great a fascination for him, and he felt that his future was bound up with her. The details will never be known; the

Colonel omits in his *Old Diary Leaves* all references to his wife, who, if she was a normal kind of wife, must have rued the day the bulky figure of Madame Blavatsky appeared on the horizon. We know, from a sentence in one of H.P.B.'s letters written ten years later, only that Mrs. Olcott married again and that the Colonel's future relationship with her was not cordial. The actual sentence is: "I do not think Olcott shall ever visit America—no fear of that, for he is too afraid of his horrid wife and her new husband."

Mrs. Olcott—née Mary Epplee Morgan, a clergyman's daughter—is scarcely mentioned in theosophical literature; she existed by implication only. Whether she suffered, or was glad, to see her husband drift away, not in the arms of Madame Blavatsky—we are assured that nothing like that happened—but in her inspired presence, we do not know. Such impedimenta as wife and children were of small moment compared with the Masters of Wisdom: they had designated the Colonel, as they had designated H.P.B., out of the millions of the human race, to receive the Ancient Wisdom which had been submerged in this age of materialism and stupendous progress. Colonel Olcott was, of course, far less important than H.P.B. The Masters had picked the right person when they picked her. For courage, vitality, audacity, imagination and erudition, she had no rival. She was, really, a kind of female Karl Marx on the cloudy plane of occultism. On the other side of the Atlantic, in the British Museum reading-room to be exact, sat that bearded German-Jewish giant of the intellect, foreseeing by his theory of historical materialism the downfall of classes and social systems, and struggling with his International Working Men's Association; and in New York, in her lodgings in Irving Place, sat Madame Blavatsky, soon to begin writing her "Das Kapital", called *Isis Unveiled*, which would throw down tedious magical *grimoires* and set up Hidden Masters in their place, and on the verge of starting her international association—the Theosophical Society. But for the moment, she could reckon up only failures: the Miracle Club had failed, the *Spiritual Scientist* had failed, marriage had failed, and only Madame Blavatsky herself, with her large hypnotic blue eyes, had not yet failed.

During her "At Homes" at 46 Irving Place, she gathered around her men who were interested in magic, the Hebrew Cabbala, Egyptian religion, rope tricks and other tricks, and who turned their gaze to the mysterious East. She had already met some of the "best intellects" in America and was meeting more; they were talking of weird subjects in that age of materialism and stupendous progress.

The Unitarian clergyman, the Rev. J. H. Wiggin, was one of them: all I have been able to find out about him was that he later turned his attention to Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science.

A young Englishman, Charles Sotheran, was another. He was a top-grade Freemason and collector of incunabula or old books. He was also interested in the Cabbala. I wrote to the well-known London booksellers of this name, but they replied that Charles Sotheran was not of them.

William Quan Judge, a clerk in the Colonel's law business, a quiet, bearded and ambitious little man was also there: he followed the stream which led to the other side of the moon.

Signor Bruzzesi, called the Count—*Il Conte*—sculptor and one-time secretary to the great Mazzini, was perhaps the most spectacular of Madame's visitors. He was an old friend of hers, had known her in her European days, and, as a fellow magician, had trodden the same winding path. It was he who opened the window of Madame's apartment, and with a few beckoning passes in the air—lo and behold!—a pure white butterfly flew into the room. The Colonel omits to say at what time of the day or season of the year this happened: the depths of winter is the best season for this magical trick.

"That's pretty," said H.P.B. laughing, "but I also can do it!"

She opened the window, and after similar beckoning passes, in came another white butterfly, and chased the first one round the room and up to the ceiling; then they flew into a corner and—hey presto!—disappeared.

"What *does* it mean?" asked the Colonel, quite bewildered.

"Only this," replied H.P.B. "Signor Bruzzesi can make an elemental turn itself into a butterfly, and so can I."

"In other words," comments the Colonel, "the insects were not real but illusionary."

An elemental, for those who don't know, is a general term for the non-human spirits of the earth or air—fairies, undines, pixies, nixies, sylphs, salamanders and so forth.

The Colonel's life was certainly more entertaining with Madame Blavatsky than it had been with Mary, his wife.

What went on behind the door of Madame Blavatsky's apartment at 46 Irving Place was of sufficient interest to the world in general for "one or two gentlemen journalists" to attend, and for Mr. Wiggin, described as a broad-minded clergyman, to write about. (I only know that he was broad-minded and not of the other kind because the Colonel, when he came to describe the professions and conditions of persons who attended Madame Blavatsky's "At Homes", used this qualification for clergymen. Narrow-minded clergymen, certainly, would find no place in Madame Blavatsky's circle, and I should think that they would be appalled to find themselves there, for the conversation was mainly about spirits from the other world, a subject which the Church calls necromancy and holds in abhorrence.)

Mr. Wiggin's notice appeared in *The Liberal Christian* on 4 September, 1875. Apart from himself, H.P.B. and the Colonel, there were present, he says, Signor Bruzzesi, Charles Sotheran, a New Jersey judge and his poet wife, and a Mr. J. H. Felt, who was an engineer and architect by profession, and a dabbler in occultism in his spare time. They discussed with animation the phallic element in religion, the soul of flowers, the latest works on magic, and several other pressing subjects, and began to think of going home only when the clock struck twelve.

The main item of the next meeting, which took place on the evening of 7 September, was a lecture entitled "The Lost Canon of Proportion of the Egyptians". It was given by Mr. Felt to an audience of fourteen persons, excluding the hostess, H.P.B., and her inseparable companion, Colonel Olcott. Mr. Felt's theme was that the men who designed the pyramids were Adepts in occult science, not just bricklayers or builders, and that they set up their plan according to a magic formula—that is, a formula kept from the understanding of the masses, the profane. This formula, which Mr. Felt had discovered, consisted of a square with a circle inside it, and another square within that circle, and within that square three triangles and a five-sided figure. This is something different from those geometrical figures, found in books on alchemy, which illustrate the principle of the squaring of the circle, a problem which exercised the mind of mediaeval man. As a matter of fact, this so-called formula sprang from the brain of Mr. Felt, for he did not take it, as far as I am aware, from any sign or geometrical figure of the ancient Egyptians. It is a pity that the Colonel who records all this didn't make it a little clearer by a diagram. *Old Diary Leaves* is illustrated with several pictures of subjects which, although very interesting, are not difficult for the imagination to grasp without any illustration.

From this formula or, rather, diagram, Mr. Felt deduced the whole variety of ancient Egyptian architecture, including hieroglyphs; and he extended this "canon of proportion" to explain also all the masterpieces of Greek art. The Colonel summed it up by saying "it is, in fact, the true canon of Nature's architecture".

A member of the audience, a doctor of medicine called Seth Pancoast, who was also an erudite Cabbalist, asked Mr. Felt if he could prove all this. Could the canon of proportion, for example, evoke spirits from the spatial deep?

Mr. Felt jumped up and straightway replied that it most certainly could; he had seen literally hundreds of shadowy forms; they resembled humans but they showed no signs of any intelligence. He called them "apparitions". In conclusion, he said that he was willing to aid suitable persons to test the system whereby these spirits or elementals were evoked. And he promised that in a future series of lectures he would exhibit them for all to see.

An animated discussion followed, in the course of which it occurred to the Colonel that it would be a good thing to form a society for the purpose of pursuing such occult research. He reflected on this for a while; then he wrote on a scrap of paper: *Would it not be a good thing to form a society for this kind of study?* and gave it to William Quan Judge for him to hand it to Madame Blavatsky. She took it, read it, and nodded her head in assent. The Colonel now waited for a lull in the conversation to give him an opportunity of getting up and asking the rest of the company what they thought of the idea. He rose slowly and began to talk about the present condition of the spiritualist movement and the attitude of its opponents, the materialists; this brought him to the conflict between science and religion in general; he then went blithely back several thousand years to the Ancient Wisdom which could, he maintained, reconcile the conflict. . . . Mr. Felt's sublime achievement in extracting the key to the architecture of Nature. . . . He came at last to the point, and proposed that a society of occultists should be organized for the purpose of diffusing information on the secret laws of Nature, laws with which the Egyptians and Chaldeans had been familiar but which were totally unknown to modern scientists.

The company thought it a splendid idea—who would not?—and Mr. Felt, whose fascinating lecture had started it all, said that he would be willing to teach them how to evoke and control elementals. Mr. Judge then moved that the Colonel should be the President of this society and, upon the Colonel's motion, Mr. Judge was elected Secretary.

The following evening, after Mr. Felt had given another lecture on the Egyptians and their occult secrets, several sensible resolutions were passed, the most important of which was that a committee of three should be appointed to draft a constitution and by-laws of the proposed society. There were sixteen persons present in all.

The title of the society was not decided until the third meeting on 13 September. Several titles were suggested: the Egyptological, the Hermetic, the Rosicrucian and others, but none seemed right. In desperation, Mr. Sotheran seized the dictionary and began turning the pages. His eye lighted on the word *theosophy*, a compound of two Greek words meaning "divine wisdom".

"Some stupid story has gone about," wrote the Colonel, "that, while the committee were sitting, a strange Hindu walked into the room, threw a sealed packet upon the table and walked out again, or vanished, or something of the sort; the packet, when opened, being found to contain a complete draft of a constitution and by-laws for the society, which we at once adopted. This is sheer nonsense."

At this meeting, Mr. Felt illustrated his fascinating discoveries with a number of coloured diagrams. A strange light was seen quivering over these diagrams by some members of the audience, but the Colonel put this down to a hallucination.

[illegible]

Chapter Nine

TWO HUNDRED CIGARETTES A DAY

AFTER giving birth to the Theosophical Society, Madame Blavatsky went to Ithaca, in the State of New York, to stay with Hiram Corson, professor of Anglo-Saxon and English literature at Cornell University. Corson was the sort of "best intellect" whom the mysterious Master Serapis had urged the Colonel to introduce to H.P.B., but the professor had introduced himself. The death of his only daughter had made him turn to spiritualism, and after reading H.P.B.'s defence of the Eddy brothers against the attack of Dr. Beard he sat down and wrote to her. Soon letters were flowing between Ithaca and wherever H.P.B. happened to be.

The first of Madame Blavatsky's letters to Corson is dated 9 February, 1875, and was sent from Philadelphia. It is devoted mainly to an attack on Dr. Child, the nigger in the spiritualist wood-pile. The second letter, undated but also from Philadelphia, tells him something of her work and background. "I am here in this country sent by my Lodge on behalf of Truth in modern spiritualism." This use of the word "lodge" has been made familiar through Freemasonry; it means, simply, the members composing a branch of a Masonic, or similar, organization. H.P.B. was not referring to Freemasonry; the society to which she belonged was far more exalted, namely that of the Great White Brotherhood: the Brotherhood of Luxor was one of its branches. The word "White" is not a reference to the colour of their skin—indeed, the Brothers had brown skins—but to their magic; they practised white or good magic as opposed to black or bad magic. In this same letter, Andrew Jackson Davis, and other spiritualists, are described as "school-boys just trying to spell their ABC and sorely blundering sometimes".

H.P.B.'s letters to Corson grow more personal, and when the professor invites her to come and stay with him and his wife, she asks him what he thinks he will say when he sees his guest stealing away from the room every fifteen minutes to smoke a cigarette in the basement. H.P.B. had found out by the angry and amazed stares she had received that women did not smoke in Victorian society.

It seems that she was shy of accepting the Corsons' invitation; she was, she wrote, only "a poor barbarian who has fallen from her Cossack-land into your civilized country like some ill-shaped aerolite from the moon". Corson's reply to this, if he did reply, has not been preserved, but after her disarming description of herself he could only have urged her to come at her earliest convenience.

Hiram Corson and his French wife were living at this time in a so-called cottage on the east hill where the University stands; it was actually a large villa of boarded construction on a stone foundation.

She arrived on 17 September, 1875. She was dressed in an elaborate robe consisting of an embroidered jacket of black silk with a voluminous skirt of the same material, and above this, partly covering the top of her head, was what was called a loose wrapper or mantle: from her photograph, which she had had taken in Ithaca, she looks as if the sitting-room curtains had fallen on her; but this was just one of the Victorian styles. It was more the accessories which distinguished her—the cigarette papers in one pocket, the tobacco in another, the fifteen or so rings on her fingers, and so forth.

She spent most of the day, and part of the night, writing in her room, and broke off only for dinner. Here at Ithaca, according to Corson's son,* she began *Isis Unveiled*, and wrote daily about twenty-five foolscap pages. She was too absorbed in her work even to look at the splendid view of the valley. Corson, who had hoped to see more of his guest than this, one day suggested a carriage drive; he wanted to show her something of the countryside, and the University buildings. H.P.B. agreed. The day of the outing came round. There was something on Corson's mind: if she smoked in the carriage, this would create a bad impression and do his reputation harm. He therefore begged her not to.

**Some Unpublished Letters of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky*, with an introduction and commentary by Eugene Rollin Corson, 1929.

Before they had got far, she told him that she could sit still no longer; she must smoke or jump out of the carriage, and what if people did see her smoke? What harm was that? They would just think she was a gipsy, that's all. The carriage stopped in a quiet spot, and H.P.B. clambered out. She quickly rolled herself a cigarette, lit it and puffed away before the eyes of the surprised coachman. Corson ascribed her attitude to her intensity and single-mindedness. In a letter to a friend, he said that she smoked two hundred cigarettes a day, an impossible number, even if she chain-smoked.

On the whole he was disappointed in her visit. He had asked her down in the hope that they would have some "sittings", i.e. that she would get in touch with the spirit of his departed daughter, but this she refused to do. "She is . . . ignorant of all the graces and amenities of life," wrote Corson. "She is a great Russian bear."

However, H.P.B. did try her magic arts on the Corsons a little.

One night Corson returned home from a visit to Andrew D. White, the University President. In the course of the evening he had looked at some of the President's well-made, watermarked notepaper, held it up to the light, felt its fine quality. It was late when he came home, and both his wife and H.P.B. had gone to bed.

Upon awakening in the morning, he found on the little table beside his bed a photograph of his dead daughter: there was a wreath of flowers in her hair and in the background were the outlines of elementals. What was more astonishing, however, was that the photograph was printed on the same notepaper as that which he had examined in the President's study: the watermark was identical. Corson rushed to his wife in great excitement.

She took the photograph from his hand, looked at it; then she burst into tears and threw it into the fire, screaming, "This is the work of the Devil!"

Dr. Eugene R. Corson, the professor's son, a Bachelor of Science and Doctor of Medicine, offered no explanation of this amazing story. He was not even surprised; he only regretted that the photograph had been thrown into the fire. At the time of Madame Blavatsky's visit he was away from Ithaca studying medicine. From his parents, or perhaps from the servants, he was also told that H.P.B. caused a heavy table to rise in the air through mesmeric intent.

Chapter Ten

IN THE ASTRAL LIGHT

On her return from Ithaca, H.P.B. learnt that the next meeting of the Theosophical Society was to be held in the home of Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten, a successful medium and gifted speaker. Mrs. Britten was on the verge of publishing a fairly long book called *Art Magic* which, she said, she had not written but taken down at the dictation of an Adept of her acquaintance, called the Chevalier Louis. Like other Adepts, the Chevalier Louis was a shadowy figure. Although the author of the work, his name does not appear on the title-page of *Art Magic*; and Mrs. Britten's name appears only at the end of her short preface. (With customary obtuseness the librarians of the British Museum have catalogued the book under Mrs. Britten's name, as if she and not the Chevalier was the author.)

There is more magic than art in *Art Magic*. It affirms the existence of Adepts, the reality of the Astral Light,* and of White and Black Magic. It also affirms, as one would expect, the swarming of elementals in the air and on the earth, and gives directions for bringing them to heel. Its price was high for those days: $5.

Before the publication of the work, a prospectus was issued in which it was stated that the author would permit only five hundred copies to be printed, and that the right of refusing to sell the work to anyone found unworthy would be reserved. This was no idle threat. A letter published by Mrs. Britten in

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*There are, according to theosophical and spiritualist writers, other, non-physical worlds. The world nearest to the physical world is the astral, so-called because of the luminous quality of its atmosphere. Here thoughts dwell in themselves apart from human minds. This world is said to be bathed in the Astral Light, which is the light visions are seen by.

The Banner of Light, under the heading of "The Slanderers of *Art Magic*", stated that she had refused to sell twenty copies of the book to "little pugs".

The Colonel subscribed to two copies of *Art Magic*; and after he had read it, he wrote and asked Mrs. Britten if she could let him see a portrait of the Chevalier. On the express condition that he showed it to no one outside the house, Mrs. Britten sent him a portrait drawing. The Colonel was not impressed. To his mind, the Chevalier Louis had neither the age nor the stern features which he associated with an Adept. On the contrary, the Chevalier, with his mutton-chop whiskers* and a face as vapid as that of a fashionable "lady killer", looked quite unlike any Adept, and no more than twenty-five years of age. "One who has been face to face with a real Adept," wrote the Colonel, who had by the time he wrote this been face to face with several, "would be forced by this effeminate dawdler's countenance to suspect that either Mrs. Britten had, *faute de mieux*, shown a bogus portrait of the real author, or that the book was written by no 'Chevalier Louis' at all."

At the meeting of the Theosophical Society at Mrs. Britten's home at 206 West 38th Street on 16 October, there were eighteen persons present.

A Mr. C. C. Massey, English barrister and spiritualist, was waiting to catch a boat for England; for this reason, he was introduced first. He made some remarks, and then hurried away. The members then got down to discussing the by-laws.

The next meeting, again at Mrs. Britten's home, was on 30 October. At this meeting the members sorted out for themselves the various offices of the Society. Olcott remained President. The secretaryship was taken away from Judge, the Colonel's twenty-four-year-old clerk, and given to one John Storer Cobb; and Judge, on account of his knowledge of law, was given the office of Counsel to the Society instead. Madame Blavatsky was elected Corresponding Secretary, an office which shielded her from any of the humdrum business of the Society and foreshadowed her rôle as the theoretician of the movement and chief scribe. Mrs. Britten was one of the Councillors, and so on.

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*The Colonel also wore mutton-chop whiskers; later he grew a long, full beard which made him look older than he was.

* * *

According to the Colonel, Madame Blavatsky had begun writing *Isis Unveiled* before she went to Ithaca. Dr. Eugene Corson is therefore wrong when he says that she started this work in his parents' home.

"I wrote this last night 'by order', but what the deuce it is to be I don't know," said H.P.B. as she handed the Colonel several sheets of paper covered with her handwriting. "Perhaps it is for a newspaper article, perhaps for a book, perhaps for nothing: anyhow, I did as I was ordered." After the Colonel had read the sheets, she put them away in a drawer and said nothing further. The "order" was, of course, from the Master, whose name was not divulged.

The publication some months later of *Art Magic* undoubtedly spurred H.P.B. on with her own book, for which she had not yet found a title. If Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten could write a work of 476 pages on the occult sciences, so could she—a bigger and better book, in fact, and one which would not assert anything so absurd as that the cultivation of intercourse with the spirits of the dead and the acceptance of Spirit Guides and Controls (the method of mediumship) were aids in the development of Adept powers!

The Colonel found an apartment for his "chum" and himself at 433 West 34th Street. It was absurd, and a waste of time, whatever people might think, for them to continue to live apart. H.P.B. slept on the first floor, and the Colonel on the floor above. Daily he went off to his law office to earn a living, leaving H.P.B. behind to write *Isis Unveiled*. The Theosophical Society had been founded, but no one knew, really, what it was all about. In other words, it lacked a theory. It was like the Communist International without the *Communist Manifesto*.

If the Society were to survive and grow, someone must supply the theoretical basis of it. H.P.B. glued herself to her chair beside her desk, and read and wrote and smoked for seventeen hours a day, until two, and past two, in the morning: a formidable task had to be done, and she brought formidable powers to the doing of it.

They moved to a more commodious apartment at 302 West 47th Street. The newspapers, never far from the tracks of "the Theosophical Twins", called this place the Lamasery. A lamasery is a monastery of Lamas, such as one finds in Tibet, perched high up on a mountain cliff, remote, almost inaccessible, where (to Western eyes) strange, not to say weird, rites are performed. The Lamasery at 302 West 47th Street was not remote in any physical sense; on the contrary, a regular stream of visitors arrived there of an evening, among whom was the classical scholar Alexander Wilder, author of a number of books on ancient mysteries. He was reader to J. W. Bouton, the publisher, and he advised Bouton to publish *Isis Unveiled*, which contained, the Colonel tells us, not a few of his own ideas.

The furniture of the living-room of the Lamasery seems to have been mainly stuffed animals: stuffed monkeys peered from curtain cornices, a stuffed snake lay on top of the looking-glass which hung above the chimney-piece, a large stuffed baboon, clad in a collar, white cravat and spectacles, and carrying under his arm the manuscript of a lecture on the *Descent of Species*, stood upright in a corner. A grey owl perched appropriately on top of a bookcase, a lion's head glared from above the doorway, a toy lizard or two crept up the wall, and a cuckoo-clock hung to the left of the chimney: the list suggests a taxidermist's studio or a junk shop, but the more ordinary items of furniture—well-upholstered armchairs—were there as well to make the room comfortable enough.

It sometimes happened that a visitor to the Lamasery would suddenly in the midst of the conversation hold up his finger and say "Ssh!" Silence ensued. A musical note would then be heard. Astral bells. Sometimes they would sound far away in the distance; then they would come nearer and gain volume until the elfin music would float round the room, near the ceiling and die away. Sometimes Madame Blavatsky would fling out her hand with an imperious gesture and—*Ping! Ping!*—the silvery tones of a bell.

In *Old Diary Leaves* there is an account of how, during two years of continuous effort, H.P.B. wrote *Isis Unveiled.* It is a curious account. No book ever before had been written like it, not even Mrs. Britten's. It was more than a task; it was a supernatural experience, for H.P.B. was writing, she openly admitted, about things she had never studied, and quoting from books she had never read. Whence, then, asks the Colonel in apparent bewilderment, did she get her knowledge? Not from her governesses in Russia, nor from her innumerable railway and steamship journeys, the Colonel replies light-heartedly; and goes on to point out that her library contained barely a hundred volumes: from the quotations alone in *Isis Unveiled*, one would think that she had sat in an alcove of the British Museum library. (In those days and for quite a time afterwards there were alcoves in the North Library of the British Museum, and very cosy they were too.) The Colonel knew the answer, of course, for when he left his office, where he laboured to keep two homes going, he would return to 302 West 47th Street and sit opposite her, on the other side of their large desk, and watch her at work, and see exactly how she quoted from books which she'd never read.

Her pen would be flying over the page. Suddenly she would stop, look into space "with the vacant eye of the clairvoyant seer, shorten her vision as though to look at something held invisibly in the air before her, and begin copying on her paper what she saw". In other words, she was reading the piece *in the Astral Light.* The quotation finished, her eyes would resume their natural expression, and she would continue writing in a normal manner until she was prompted to make another quotation by the same means.

The Colonel was not just sitting on the other side of the desk, looking at his inspired companion and twiddling his thumbs. There was a lot of work on *Isis Unveiled* that he, too, had to do, such as correcting the spelling, improving the English, and verifying references, but as the Colonel lacked H.P.B.'s clairvoyant capacity, he could not read in the Astral Light, and she had to "materialize" the book for him.

"I cannot pass this quotation," said the Colonel, "for I am sure it cannot read as you have it."

"Oh, don't bother," said H.P.B., looking up. "It's all right; let it pass."

But the Colonel refused to let it pass.

"Well, keep still a minute and I'll try to get it," said H.P.B. A far-away look came into her great blue eyes, and presently she pointed to a corner of the room, to a shelf on which were a few curios. "There!" she exclaimed, and came to herself again. "Go and look for it over there!"

The Colonel got up and went to the shelf. To his surprise, he found there the two volumes of the book he wanted. They had not been in the house until that very moment, he solemnly tells us. He compared the text with her quotation and, as he suspected, she had misquoted. He made the necessary alteration, and then, with her permission, returned the two books to the shelf. A moment later, while he was going back to his seat, they mysteriously faded away.

H.P.B. was also assisted by other magical means. While she slept someone, like the elves in the fairy story, wrote for her, and in the morning she was able to show the Colonel "a pile of at least thirty or forty pages of beautifully written H.P.B. manuscripts". More frequently she was possessed by a superior intelligence, a Hidden Master, and this explains why the manuscript exhibited such startling differences of style, and levels of literacy. The Colonel writes about this as if the possession of H.P.B.'s body was a material possession, as if H.P.B. flew out of her skin and a Master flew into it—which is absurd, and unnecessary. But the best summary of the writing of *Isis Un-*

veiled is given by H.P.B. herself in a letter to her sister, Vera Zhelikhovsky.

"I am solely occupied, not with writing *Isis*, but with Isis herself. I live in a kind of permanent enchantment, a life of visions and sights, with open eyes, and no chance whatever to deceive my senses! I sit and watch the fair good goddess constantly. And as she displays before me the secret meaning of her long-lost *secrets*, and the veil, becoming with every hour thinner and more transparent, gradually falls off before my eyes, I hold my breath and can hardly trust to my senses! . . . Night and day the images of the past are ever marshalled before my inner eyes. Slowly, and gliding silently like images in an enchanted panorama, centuries after centuries appear before me. . . . I certainly refuse point-blank to attribute it to my own knowledge or memory. I tell you seriously I am helped. And he who helps me is my Guru."

This description conjures up a picture of Madame Blavatsky in her New York flat, pen in hand, smoking hashish—a legitimate aid to getting behind the veil.

By the spring of 1877 *Isis Unveiled* had grown to half-a-million words, too large for the covers of one volume. At first, H.P.B. had intended to call it *The Veil of Isis*, but before the work was published, Bouton wrote to tell her that Charles Sotheran had informed him that a book called *The Veil of Isis* had recently appeared in England.

In spite of having the page-proofs before her, H.P.B. was still busy writing: revising, deleting, transposing, but mainly adding more matter and demanding fresh proofs until Bouton wrote in despair to the Colonel that the cost of resetting the type had already run up a bill for $280.80 and that "by the time the book appears, it will be handicapped with such fearful expense that each copy of the first thousand will cost a great deal more than we shall get for it, a very discouraging state of affairs to begin with".

The inspired author naturally took no notice of this consideration but went on working furiously.

Finally, on 29 September, 1877, *Isis Unveiled* appeared in two large volumes. It was sub-titled "A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology". The first volume was called *Science*, the second, *Theology*. The editors of spiritualist papers, who had expected another *Art Magic*, were floored by it, and the daily press was bored. The *Springfield Republican* called it "a large dish of hash"; and the New York *Sun* dismissed it as "discarded rubbish". The review in the *Tribune* was no better, and the New York *Times* declined to review it at all. As the editor of this paper confessed to Bouton, he had a holy horror of Madame Blavatsky and her theosophy. The New York *Herald* was the only paper which seems to have made an effort to do the book justice. When H.P.B. read the review she almost fainted, or so she wrote to Aksakov. "I had prepared myself for general abuse, and here, believe it or not, is such praise, and that from one of the most conservative, catholic papers. Look at the last paragraph, where it says that '*Isis Unveiled* is one of the remarkable productions of the century'."

The publisher had undertaken the book in the hope that the public were ripe for revelations about occult mysteries: there were signs pointing in that direction, and signs pointing the other way. Whether the public were ripe in 1877 for *Isis Unveiled*, or have grown ripe since, is a difficult question to answer; but within ten days of publication, and in spite of adverse notices, the book sold out. Like Mr. Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*, it exceeded all expectations. It was unprecedented for a work of this kind.

What is *Isis Unveiled* about? Is it possible to condense so vast and obscure a work into a sentence, and to convey at the same time something of its excitement—for excitement it has? This can, I think, be done best by an hypothesis: if Atlantis had really existed, and if one person, a single Initiate, had been selected by the gods to give to the world the arcane knowledge which was swept away when Atlantis was submerged,* then H.P.B.

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*Atlantis disappeared beneath the waves about 80,000 years ago. It is said to have stretched from Scotland to Brazil.

was that Initiate, and *Isis Unveiled* a repository of that knowledge. Indeed, Madame Blavatsky believed that she alone, out of the millions of the human race, had been selected by the Masters to reveal forgotten wisdom. Thus we learn for the first time of the Secret Science which was expounded by the *rishis* of old who included among their august number Buddha, Confucius, Lao Tze, Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Plato and Apollonius of Tyana. And Christ, too, in spite of the anti-Christian sentiments in *Isis Unveiled*. We are also told of the existence of Hidden Masters who are said to be living in the flesh, but who are hardly bound by the physical laws which govern the rest of mankind. These Masters or Brothers inhabit remote places like Tibet, or Yucatan in swamp-covered Central America.

H P Blavatsky

Her signature

Chapter Eleven

BARON DE PALM

Isis Unveiled was not, some critics now said, a dish of hash: that was too summary a judgment. It was, on the contrary, an original and even important work, foreshadowing new intellectual interests such as telepathy and a less mechanical view of the nature of the human mind; but Madame Blavatsky hadn't written it! In the same breath they mentioned, not the name of a Hidden Master (for critics do not believe in Mystic Brotherhoods), but Joseph Henry Louis Charles, Baron de Palm, who had recently died in New York and whose obsequies had been conducted by the Theosophical Society. He was the author of *Isis Unveiled*, and not the flamboyant spiritualist, Madame Blavatsky. Thus the Baron de Palm, who had never published a line in his life, achieved a posthumous fame as an author, and the Colonel years later was still explaining that the Baron was only a silly old man.

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One night in December, 1875, while H.P.B. and the Colonel were working at *Isis Unveiled*, there came a tap at the door. The door being opened, the Baron de Palm, "Grand Cross Commander of the Sovereign Order of the Holy Sepulchre, Knight of St. John of Malta, Prince of the Roman Empire," and of many other orders of equal merit, was revealed.

I forget where I read this story of his unexpected arrival. In *Old Diary Leaves* the Colonel does not say how the baron presented himself, only that he came with a letter of introduction from the editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*. The story is apocryphal, and the baron, who had been brought up in the formal dignity of the Bavarian Court, was most unlikely to have dropped round in this fashion.

The Colonel writes of him with a feeling which almost touches on affection, tells us that the baron was much interested in spiritualism and the Oriental theories of the Theosophical Society, that he had charming manners, and that there was no doubt whatsoever that he was a real baron, and had moved all his life in the best circles. Although a man of considerable wealth, he was staying in a wretched New York boarding-house where, says the Colonel, no one cared if he lived or died. After consulting with H.P.B., the Colonel offered him the spare room in their apartment.

The baron was soon sitting on the Council of the Theosophical Society, but he did not sit there for long. He was in the worst possible health and was removed to the Roosevelt Hospital where he died on the evening of 19 May, 1876. An autopsy revealed that he had been suffering from all sorts of complaints.

He had asked that no priest should officiate at his funeral. Furthermore, that his funeral should be conducted in the manner of the Orient: namely, that his body should be burnt, and that his friend, the Colonel, "should perform the last offices in a fashion that would illustrate the Eastern notions of death and immortality". Out of gratitude to the Colonel for his kindness, the baron had left him all his wealth.

At that time, cremation was a new idea in the West, and one which was regarded with horror by the public at large, with disapproval by the Church, and with confusion as to its legality by the civil authorities—at least in Britain where, during 1874, the subject was introduced by Sir Henry Thompson, F.R.C.S., M.B., in an article which he published in *The Contemporary Review*. He contended that the present method of disposing of the dead, namely, that of burial beneath the soil, was unnecessarily expensive and—what was more—full of danger to the living.

Sir Henry was not the first to become alarmed at the danger of graveyards. In 1850 a report on a General Scheme for Extramural Sepulture was published; and this report quoted from an earlier report, by a Dr. Lyon Playfair, which gave some ghoulish details: "I have examined various churchyards and burial grounds," wrote this eminent Victorian, "for the purpose of ascertaining whether the layer of earth above the bodies is sufficient to absorb the putrid gases evolved. The slightest inspection shows that they are not thoroughly absorbed by the soil lying over the bodies. I know several churchyards from which most foetid smells are evolved. . . ."

The result of Sir Henry's revolutionary proposals was that in 1875 the Cremation Society was formed, but it was not until some years afterwards that they were able to erect, at Woking, a crematorium.*

A similar society, which the Colonel described as a "dilettante sort of body", and of which he was a member, had been formed in New York during 1874; but for want of a corpse, they were unable to put their ideas into practice. The baron was therefore a godsend to the Colonel. "Here, at last," he wrote, "was the chance of having a body to burn, and thus inaugurating the very needed reform. I offered it to the Society and it was accepted. The weather being warm for the season, urgent haste was called for."

The funeral had to take place first, and in view of the fact that it was going to be a theosophical, and not a Christian, funeral—theosophy was leading H.P.B. and the Colonel steadily away from Christianity—it had to be done with elaboration and dignity.

The Colonel saw that it was going to be a big affair, so he hired the great hall of the Masonic Temple at the corner of 23rd Street and 6th Avenue; and then, with H.P.B., got down to writing a litany and a couple of "Orphic" hymns. Notices of these preparations began to appear in the press. They were not conspicuously friendly notices, and they made the members of the New York Cremation Society, who were going to take over afterwards, rather uneasy: this was something more than they had bargained for. They were not, after all, theosophists. The secretary of the Cremation Society therefore wrote to the Colonel to say that they wished to withdraw from the whole business.

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*In 1957, 28 per cent of those who died in Britain were cremated, an increase of 2 per cent over the number cremated during 1956. Assuming 1,000 persons are buried to an acre, this meant a saving of 163 acres and £800,000 to the rates. These figures are taken from Lord Verulam's presidential address to the Cremation Society on 24 July, 1958.

The Colonel was disgusted, and disconcerted, but only for half an hour or so. Then he boldly decided to incinerate the body of his poor friend himself: he was not a moral coward. Meanwhile the obsequies had to take place.

An hour before the appointed time the street was crowded, and a strong body of police had to be sent for to prevent the doors from being smashed down.

"We had issued two kinds of admission tickets," wrote the Colonel, "both of triangular shape, one a black card printed in silver, for reserved seats, the other a drab one printed in black, for general admission; and the police were instructed not to admit anybody without one or the other kind of ticket. But an American or British mob is hard to restrain, and there was such a rush when the doors were opened that the 1,500 holders of tickets had to find seats as best they could. The great hall, which holds 2,000 people, was crowded in every corner, the very passages and lobbies were blocked, and from the buzz of conversation and uneasiness prevailing it was easy to see that the multitude had come to gratify its curiosity, certainly not to evince either respect for the dead or sympathy with the Theosophical Society. It was just in that uncertain mood when the least unexpected and sensational incident might transform it into the wild beast that an excited crowd becomes at times. Through the whole of the previous week the leading papers had been lashing public curiosity into a frenzy. . . ."

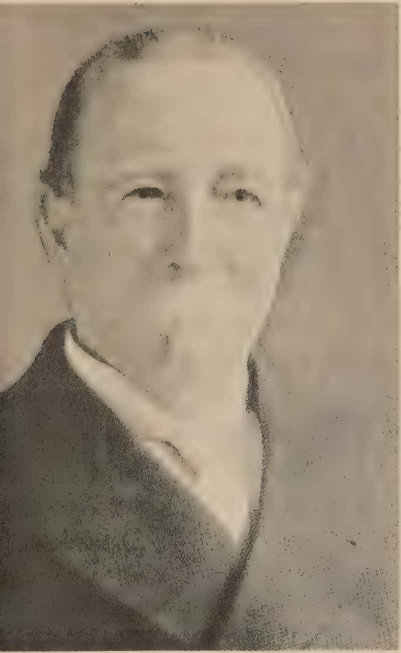
The New York *World* had anticipated the ceremony with a parody in which the Colonel, as High Priest, was dressed in a leopard skin, and held in his hand a roll of papyrus, facetiously explained as being only brown cardboard. Madame Blavatsky was the Chief Mourner, and Bearer of the Sistrum (an ancient Egyptian rattle). Vice-President Felt had "the eye of Osiris" painted on his left breast, and in his hand he carried an asp (a small, venomous, hooded serpent). And so on, not very inspired journalism.

In reality, no one was dressed up, and only half the members of the Theosophical Society were present. They were surrounding the rosewood coffin (it had silver trimmings) on the dais in front of the altar. This was a triangular-shaped Masonic altar, and upon it, or perhaps elsewhere, H.P.B. had placed an alchemical symbol of death and renewal—a cross entwined with the figure of a serpent. According to C. E. Bechhofer Roberts, from whose book *The Mysterious Madame* I have taken some of these details, "other occult symbols added further touches of mystery to the setting". The officiating theosophists were waving palm leaves about to keep off evil spirits, in which they certainly believed. The baron's many decorations were laid out on top of the coffin amid seven burning candles of different colours, representing the seven planets of old. H.P.B. was not, apparently, on the dais, but among the audience.

The Colonel does not tell us the order of the ceremony, or the way in which it began, but "all went peacefully enough" until a Methodist preacher who was assisting the Colonel on the dais took objection to something the Colonel said. The actual words used were: "There is but one first cause, uncreated——"

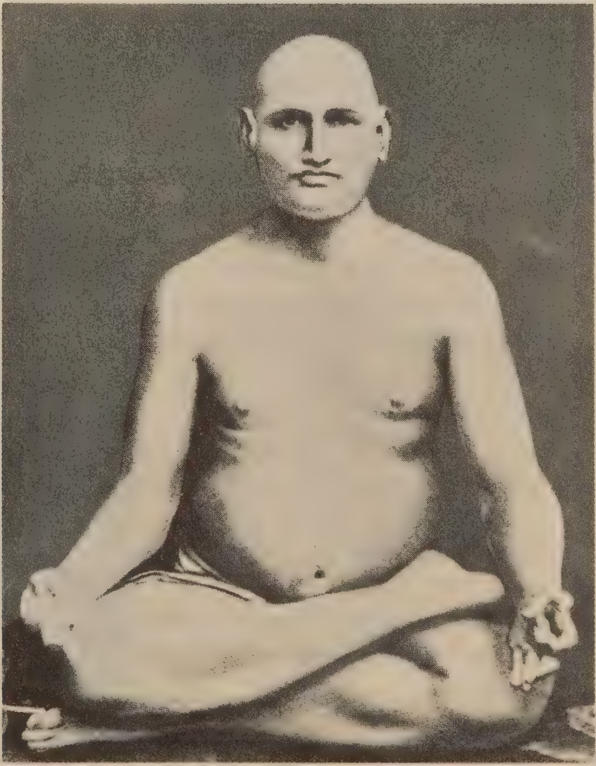
"That's a lie!" shouted the Methodist preacher, gesticulating wildly.

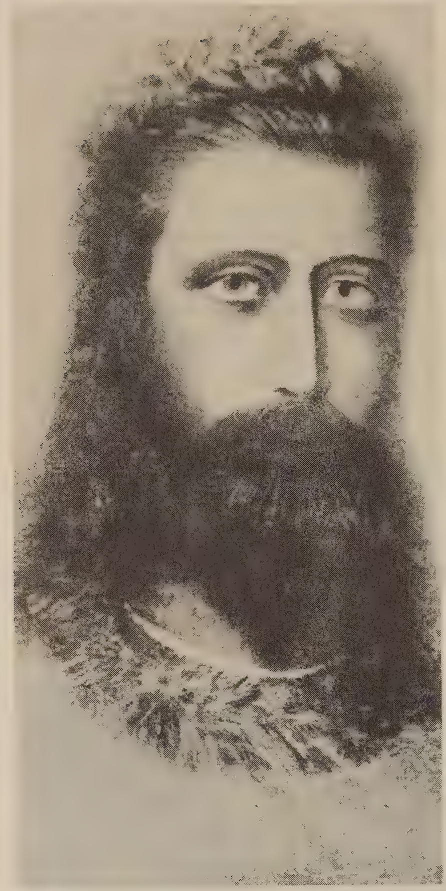
Instantly the audience sprang to its feet and some turned towards the door as if the shouting meant that a fire had broken out. Some of "the rougher sort" stood on their chairs; it seemed to the Colonel as if they were already looking where the fight was. It was one of those moments, he commented, when everything depended on the speaker.



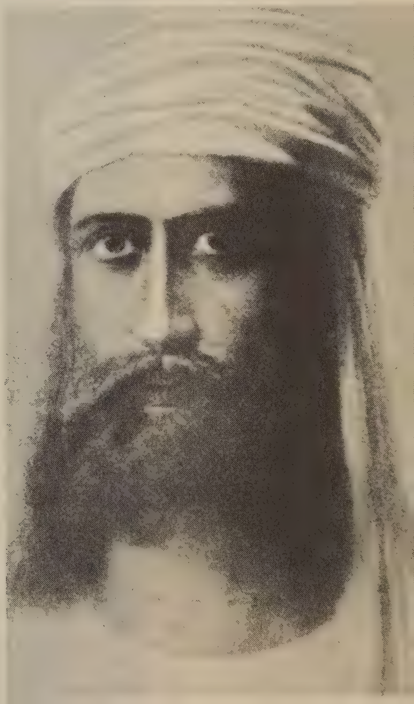
Allan Octavian Hume, "Father" of the Indian National Congress

The Great Teacher: Swami Dayananda Sarasvati





The Mahatmas:
Koot Hoomi and Morya



Stepping forward quietly he laid his left hand on the baron's coffin, faced the audience, stood motionless, and said nothing. In an instant there was a dead silence of expectancy. Then the Colonel slowly raised his right hand and said solemnly, "We are in the presence of death!" And then waited.

"The psychological effect was very interesting and amusing to me, who have for so many years been a student of crowds. The excitement was quelled like magic, and then in the same voice as before, and without the appearance of even having been interrupted, I finished the sentence of the litany—'eternal, infinite, unknown'."

As the excited Methodist preacher was being apprehended by a policeman, H.P.B. stood up and shouted:

"He's a bigot, that's what he is!"

Everybody around her began laughing, and she was soon heartily laughing too.

One of the "Orphic" hymns was then sung by the New York Saengerbund (i.e. a German singing society) to the organ accompaniment of a sixteenth-century Italian mass. "As it swelled and then died softly away in the half-gloom of the crowded but hushed room, with the symbolic fire flickering on the triangular altar, and the ancient knightly decorations flashing on the coffin, the effect was very impressive," said the reporter of the New York *Sun*.

Next, an invocation to "the Soul of the World", during the course of which the Colonel told the crowd about the life and character of Baron de Palm, and the nature and objects of the Theosophical Society.

After the singing of the second hymn, Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten, an experienced speaker, addressed the audience for about ten minutes. She bade a last farewell to the baron, declaring that he had "passed the golden gates wherein sorrow entereth not", and began strewing the bier with flowers which she described as "symbols of full-blown life".

This closed the proceedings, and the crowd quietly dispersed.

As the baron's body could not be disposed of for the moment, it was handed over to a Mr. Buckhorst, described as the Theosophical Society's undertaker, for him to keep until the Colonel could devise a crematorium. The body had already been embalmed superficially; it was embalmed again, this time thoroughly, by packing it in "desiccated clay impregnated with the carbolic and other vapours of distilled coal tar", a method which was to the Colonel's entire satisfaction.

The baron had left all his worldly wealth to the Colonel, on the understanding that he should devote it to furthering the aims of the Theosophical Society. Probate of the will was obtained, and then William Judge, the Society's lawyer, collected the dead man's trunk from the hospital. It was found to contain a small bronze bust of a crying baby, some photographs of, and letters from, actresses and prima donnas, some unreceipted bills, a few gilt and enamelled duplicates of the baron's orders of nobility, a birth certificate and certificates of several diplomatic and court appointments, the baron's passport, the draft of a former will, now cancelled, and a meagre amount of clothing, among which, to the Colonel's surprise, were two of his own shirts. A closer examination of the shirts revealed that the Colonel's stitched name-marks had been picked out. There was definitely no money or jewellery in the trunk. "This looked very cloudy indeed," said the Colonel. "A bad beginning."

The old will was a most interesting document: it described the baron as Seigneur of the Castles of the Old and New Wartensee, on Lake Constance, owner of 20,000 acres of land in Wisconsin, forty town lots in Chicago, and seven or eight mining properties in the Western States.

The rest of the story is best told in the Colonel's own dry words. "Upon the low estimate that the farming land was worth $5 per acre, the rumour spread that I had inherited at least £20,000, to say nothing of the two Swiss castles, the town lots, and the gold and silver mining claims. It ran through the whole American press, editorials were written upon it, and I received a shoal of letters, congratulatory and begging, from known and unknown persons in various countries. Mr. Judge communicated with the lady legatees, with public officials at home and abroad, and with a representative of the baron's family. This took several months, but the final result was this: the ladies would not take the Chicago lots for a gift, the Wisconsin land had been sold for taxes years before, the mining shares were good only for papering walls, and the Swiss castles proved castles in the air. . . ."

Finally, and in order to dissipate the notion that the Baron de Palm, whose body had been left on his hands, was the author of *Isis Unveiled*, the Colonel was careful to make the point that no literary documents whatsoever, not even a book, were found in the baron's trunk.

Chapter Twelve

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OF THE ARYA SAMAJ

THE Colonel tells us that H.P.B. was very corpulent, and that she aggravated this condition by the manner of her life, taking no physical exercise and eating much. He names two items of food for which she had an especial liking: fatty meats, and (for breakfast) several fried eggs swimming in a large quantity of melted butter. She also ate irregularly.

"I remember an instance at Philadelphia which shows this peculiarity in an especial degree. She had one maid-of-all-work, and on this particular day a leg of mutton was boiling for dinner. Suddenly H.P.B. bethought herself to write a note to a lady friend who lived at the other end of the city, an hour's journey each way, as there were no trams or other public conveyances going direct from the one house to the other. She called in trumpet tones for the maid, and ordered her to set off instantly with the note and bring the answer. The poor girl told her that the dinner would be spoilt, and she could not possibly get back until an hour beyond the usual time. H.P.B. would not listen and told her to be gone at once. Three-quarters of an hour later H.P.B. began complaining that the stupid idiot of a girl had not returned; she was hungry and wanted her dinner, and sent all Philadelphia servants to the Devil *en masse*. In another quarter of an hour she had grown desperate, and so we went down to the kitchen to have a look. Of course, the pots of meat and vegetables were set back on the range, the fire was banked, and the prospect of dinner was extremely small. H.P.B.'s wrath was vehement, and so there was nothing for us but to turn to and cook for ourselves. When the maid returned she was scolded so roundly that she burst into tears and gave warning!"

The results of her eating habits can easily be imagined: the fat accumulated in great masses all over her body; her chin doubled and trebled; her arms and ankles developed great bags of fat which, laughing, she would show to her visitors: it was a great joke, but the Colonel was not amused.

She was generous and childish—the receipt of a box of caviare or sweet cakes from Russia would send her into transports of joy—and, where colours and clothes were concerned, tasteless. The Colonel, who was fascinated by his formidable companion, illustrates this last failing with an account of a night out in her company. "I have gone to the theatre with her when I expected the house to rise at us. She, a stout and remarkable-looking woman, wearing a perky hat with plumes, a *grande toilette* satin dress with much trimming, a long, heavy gold chain about her neck, attached to a blue-enamelled watch, with a monogram on the back in cheap diamonds, and on her lovely hands a dozen or fifteen rings, large and small. People might laugh at her aside, but if they caught her stern eye and looked into her massive Calmuck face, their laugh soon died away and a sense of awe and wonder possessed them."

* * *

Some time during 1870, while crossing the Atlantic, the Colonel had met, and had grown friendly with, an Indian called Moolji Thackersey. The Colonel doesn't say if he was coming or going, on business or in search of pleasure, nor whether he saw Moolji on land anywhere afterwards. One gathers that they parted at the end of the journey, and that the Colonel expected never to see this Indian again. However, he had a photograph of Moolji Thackersey, in the company of another Hindu gentleman, unnamed, and when he moved into the Lamasery, he framed it and hung it on the wall.

One night during 1877 an old friend of his, called James Peebles, called round and sat just beneath this photograph, so that if the Colonel looked just above Peebles's head he could see the smiling face of his fellow-traveller, Moolji Thackersey. Now, Peebles had recently come back from a trip to India.

The Colonel took the photograph down from the wall, showed it to Peebles, and asked him if he had come across either one or the other of the two men. It so happened—believe it or not—that Peebles had actually run across Moolji Thackersey in Bombay and even had a note of his address.

The very next day the Colonel wrote to Moolji and told him all about his Society and his—and H.P.B.'s—love for India; and he invited him to become a member of the Society.

In due course Moolji Thackersey replied, and in terms no less enthusiastic; and he told the Colonel about a great Indian reformer, one Swami Dayananda Sarasvati, who had begun a powerful movement, called the Arya Samaj, for the resuscitation of the pure Vedic religion. This led to a correspondence with Hurrychund Chintamon, the President of the Bombay Arya Samaj, and through him with the Swami himself. The Colonel says that after Hurrychund had heard of his and H.P.B.'s views on the impersonality of God ("an Eternal and Omnipresent Principle which, under many different names, was the same in all religions"), he proposed that the Theosophical Society and the Arya Samaj should amalgamate. The Colonel readily agreed to this, especially after H.P.B. had whispered into his ear that Dayananda Sarasvati who, on account of his proposed reforms, had been dubbed the Luther of India, was no less than an Adept of the Himalayan Brotherhood, that is to say, one of the Hidden Masters, or, more exactly, that one of the Hidden Masters was inhabiting the body of the great Swami.

"Venerated Teacher," wrote the Colonel to Dayananda, "A number of American and other students, who earnestly seek after spiritual knowledge, place themselves at your feet, and pray you to enlighten them."

The Swami was willing to enlighten these Americans, for as Vishwa Prakash, author of *Life and Teachings of Swami*

Dayananda, says, the Swami "wanted a nucleus in the West for the propagation of Vedic faith".

In May, 1878, the Theosophical Society, which had almost ceased to meet, by a vote of its few remaining members, changed its title to *The Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj.* Henceforth the eyes of the founders looked steadfastly towards India for the fulfilment of their plans. The Arya Samaj was a great and flourishing organization, and Northern India was the principal abode of the Masters or Mahatmas—a Sanskrit word meaning literally "great soul", that is, one who has attained *moksha* or liberation from earthly bonds, but who retains his body for the purpose of helping mankind in its wearisome progress.

H.P.B. had another reason for looking towards India and for wishing, sooner or later, to go there and stay there. Her former teacher, the famous spiritualist and levitationist, Daniel Dunglas Home, had published in New York a book entitled *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism*, and in it made an ill-natured attack on the Theosophical Society—"the crazy scheme of a society enthusiastically constituted to hunt down and (*literally*) bottle one of those wondrous little imps". Home also attacked the Colonel, calling him an abettor of a shameless and wicked cheat, i.e. the materializations at Chittenden. Instead of ignoring Home and his book, H.P.B. reacted with hysterics. As the Colonel says, she was "like an exploding bomb in her moments of anger". She swore at Daniel Dunglas Home and poured out her heart to Aksakov. "That's why I'm going off for ever to India, and from shame and grief I wish to go where no one knows even my name. Home has ruined me for ever in Europe by his spite and hatred."

* * *

Towards the end of 1878, a most important event happened to the Colonel: one of the Masters of the Himalayan Brotherhood visited him in his astral body. It was late in the evening, and the Colonel had bidden H.P.B. good night and retired to his room. He was in the midst of a last read and a smoke of his pipe before turning in. The book, the Colonel makes a point of telling us, was *not* a book on ghosts. Suddenly he grew aware of something white in the right-hand corner of the room. He looked up and then dropped his book in astonishment: the Master was before him.

". . . I saw towering above me in his great stature an Oriental clad in white garments, and wearing a head-cloth or turban of amber-striped fabric, hand-embroidered in yellow floss-silk. Long raven hair hung from under his turban to the shoulders; his black beard, parted vertically on the chin in the Rajput fashion, was twisted up at the ends and carried over the ears; his eyes were alive with soul-fire; eyes which were at once benignant and piercing in glance; the eyes of a mentor and a judge, but softened by the love of a father who gazes on a son needing counsel. He was so grand a man, so imbued with the majesty of moral strength, so luminously spiritual, so evidently above average humanity, that I felt abashed in his presence, and bowed my head and bent my knee as one does before a god or god-like personage. A hand was lightly laid on my head, a sweet though strong voice bade me be seated, and when I raised my eyes, the Presence was seated in the other chair beyond the table."

He told the Colonel that he had come at a crucial time in his, the Colonel's, life, and that his actions had brought him to this point. Whether or not they were to meet often in the future—as co-workers for the good of mankind—depended on the Colonel. In order to encourage the Colonel to say yes, the Master told him that there was a great work waiting to be done for humanity, and that he had a right to share in this work, if he wished. The Master went on to say that a mysterious tie had drawn him, the Colonel, and H.P.B. together.

"He told me things about H.P.B. that I may not repeat, as well as things about myself, that do not concern third parties. How long he was there I cannot tell: it might have been a half-hour or an hour; it seemed but a minute, so little did I take note of the flight of time. At last he rose, I wondering at his great height and observing the sort of splendour in his countenance —not an external shining, but the soft gleam, as it were, of an inner light—that of the spirit."

It did occur to the Colonel, even while the Master was still there before him, that it might all be an illusion; and the wish entered his mind that the Master might leave behind him some tangible proof of his visit. The Master suddenly smiled: he could read the Colonel's thoughts. The next moment he untwisted his *fehta* or turban from his head, saluted the Colonel *au revoir*, and vanished. He had gone. The chair was empty, but on the table lay the embroidered head-cloth. There was no doubt about that. The Colonel, trembling with emotion, picked it up. Then he ran and beat on H.P.B.'s door and told her of his experience: he'd been face to face with one of the Mahatmas, a Secret Master!

So the story runs. A photograph of the turban is illustrated in *Old Diary Leaves*.

Chapter Thirteen

FLIGHT TO INDIA

It was Madame Blavatsky's peculiar merit that she had the vision and force to go to India. The face that stares at us from her best-known, and best-loved, photograph owes something of its enchantment to her travels in the East, especially in nineteenth-century India, the citadel of occultism.

To go to India was a brave step for her to take, and how she managed to take it (for neither she nor the Colonel had any money) is not known, unless the Master provided, a view which is held in theosophical circles.

As the time of her departure drew nearer, her praise of India, and the East generally, grew louder; but she was, of course, not without her misgivings. "O gods, O India of the golden face," she exclaimed, "is this really the beginning of the end!" Even if the venture was successful, it would still be the end, for she was forty-seven years of age, and by no means in the best of health.

The Colonel must have had his misgivings, too, for he was going with her—she was not, of course, leaving him behind—and one can suppose, without stretching the logic of human behaviour, that the thought of not seeing his sons, if not his wife, was an unhappy one.

The year 1878 was significant for H.P.B. in other respects too: in May, with the help of William Quan Judge, the Society's lawyer, she was divorced from Betanelly; and in July she became an American citizen. She apparently preferred to carry in India an American passport: this is the only reason that has been given for her applying for American naturalization while preparing to leave America for good. It is a sufficient reason:

the British authorities in India were rather suspicious of Russians in view of the Tsar's well-known designs for the enlargement of Asiatic Russia. Her feelings on the occasion have been recorded in this letter to her aunt, Madame Fadeyev:

> "It is the 8th of July today, an ominous day for me, but God only knows whether the omen is good or bad. Today it is exactly five years and one day since I came to America, and this moment I have just returned from the Supreme Court, where I gave my oath of allegiance to the American Republic and Constitution. Now for a whole hour I have been a citizen with equal rights to the President himself. So far so good: the workings of my original destiny have forced me into this naturalization; but to my utter astonishment and disgust I was compelled to repeat publicly after the judge, like a mere parrot, the following tirade: 'That I would renounce for ever and even to my death every kind of submission and obedience to the Emperor of Russia; that I would renounce all obedience to the powers established by him and the Government of Russia; and that I would accept the duty to defend, love and serve the Constitution of the United States alone. So help me God in whom I believe!' I was awfully scared when pronouncing this blackguardly recantation of Russia and the Emperor. And so I am not only an apostate to our beloved Russian Church, but a political renegade. A nice scrape to get into, but how am I to manage to no longer love Russia or respect the Emperor? It is easier to say a thing than to act accordingly."

On 9 December the public at large surged into the famous Lamasery to gape at the stuffed animals and bric-à-brac which were being sold by an auctioneer. The cuckoo-clock, the Chinese and Japanese cabinets, the Siamese talapoin (Buddhist monk), the fans, the rugs, the mats, the Colonel's pipes, the mechanical bird which sang, the golden god who occupied the centre of the chimney-piece, and the tables, beds and chairs—all had to be sold. Only the books—we are assured that there were not many books—had been packed up and already shipped off to India.

By 5 p.m. everything had "gone for a song"—the phrase is H.P.B.'s. And how she and the Colonel lived and slept in the

Lamasery till, at midnight on the 17th, they bade farewell to the chandelier, which was still hanging from the ceiling, and swept out, we are not told—only that they looked for their tom-cat, Charles, and failed to find him. Doubtless they worried about his fate as well as their own as they drove off to the British steamer *Canada*, which was to take them across the Atlantic.

They were not going alone to India. Rosa Bates, a middle-aged English governess, and E. Wimbridge, a long-legged, bald and bearded English architect, had arranged to go with them, and Miss Bates had actually gone on ahead—to England, the first stop. Besides this little party, there were seven other passengers on the *Canada*, one of whom was an Anglican clergyman.

They passed a wretched cold night on board because the ship had not yet got its heating apparatus working; and not until half past two the following afternoon did they leave the wharf—too late for the tide, and they had to anchor off Coney Island. H.P.B. was furious at this unexpected delay. "She raged," said the Colonel, "against the captain, pilot, engineers, owners, and even the tides." They crossed the Sandy Hook bar only at noon on the 19th. "At last," writes the Colonel as he concludes the first volume of his *Old Diary Leaves*, "at last we were crossing the blue water towards our Land of Promise; and, so full was my heart with the prospect, that I did not wait on deck to see the Navesink Highlands melt out of view, but descended to my cabin and searched for Bombay on my map of India."

The Atlantic was rough and the ship was tossed about. The Colonel, who was sea-sick, said that the storm-fiends pursued them as if in the service of their enemies. The captain tried his best to amuse the passengers by tales of shipwrecks, and H.P.B. amused herself by arguing with the Anglican clergyman about the merits of Christianity. On New Year's Day they entered the English Channel in a fog. They set foot in London on 3 January, 1879.

Charles Carlton Massey, the gentleman who had witnessed the initial beginning of the Theosophical Society, and who had rushed away to catch a boat to England, had meanwhile established a branch of the Society in London. Quite a few names were in the list of members, but, as A. P. Sinnet observed, "no one seemed to know what to do".

H.P.B. and the Colonel were the guests of Mrs. Mary Hollis-Billing, the American medium, whose Spirit Control, or communicator with the world of spirits in general, "Ski", was well known on both sides of the Atlantic. Dr. and Mrs. Hollis-Billing lived in Norwood.

On 5 January the Colonel presided at a meeting of the British Theosophical Society at the headquarters in Great Russell Street, near the British Museum. Nothing remarkable happened at this meeting, but later, when the Colonel, Wimbridge and another were walking down Cannon Street in a fog so dense that they could not even see across the street, something remarkable did happen. Suddenly Wimbridge and the other person, whose identity I have been unable to discover, uttered an exclamation of surprise. The Colonel turned his head quickly, and met the glance of the Master as he looked back at him over his shoulder. There were plenty of brown-skinned men wandering round the City during 1879, but the Colonel was in no doubt, in spite of the dense fog, that he had caught the eye of the Master, for he "recognized the face as that of an Exalted One". That is, the serene gaze of one who has attained *moksha*, liberation. "The type once seen can never be mistaken. As there is one glory of the sun and another of the moon, so there is one brightness of the average good man or woman's face, and another, a transcendent one, of the face of an Adept: through the clay lamp of the body, the inner light of the awakened spirit shines effulgently."

On their return to Norwood, they learnt to their surprise that he had been there too. And Mrs. Hollis-Billing, the Colonel's hostess, explained that when she had left her sitting-room to go to H.P.B.'s room, she was amazed to find him standing in the hall. As the front door was locked and bolted as usual his appearance was all the more surprising. She described him as a very tall, and handsome, Hindu, with a "peculiarly piercing eye" which seemed to look through her.

She was staggered and speechless. The stranger said in English, "I wish to see Madame Blavatsky", and he moved towards the door of her room. Mrs. Hollis-Billing opened it for him, and bade him enter. He did so and walked straight up to H.P.B., made her an Oriental salutation, and began speaking to her in a language which Mrs. Hollis-Billing had never heard before.

On 19 January, H.P.B., the Colonel, Wimbridge and Rosa Bates, the English governess, sailed from Liverpool in the steamship *Speke Hall*. Why Miss Bates and Mr. Wimbridge were going to India, the Colonel does not tell us at the time, but doubtless they had their reasons. They encountered more storms and endured more sea-sickness; H.P.B. swore louder than ever, but they slowly moved on towards the sunshine, passed through the Suez Canal, and on 16 February, 1879, they entered Bombay Harbour and caught sight of the holy land of India.

Moolji Thackersey, whom the Colonel had met on the Atlantic crossing nine years before, with two of his friends, came aboard to greet them, but where was Hurrychund Chintamon, the President of the Bombay branch of the Arya Samaj? The Colonel had asked him to engage a small, clean house for them, with the minimum of servants.

H.P.B. has recorded her impressions of the scene in *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan*, the title of her collection of sketches on India which were published originally in the Russian paper *Russkiy Vestnik*.

"At last we were anchored and, in a moment, were besieged, ourselves as well as our luggage, by numbers of naked, skeleton-like Hindus, Parsees, Moguls, and various other tribes. All this crowd emerged, as if from the bottom of the sea, and began to shout, to chatter, and to yell, as only the tribes of

Asia can. To get rid of this Babel confusion of tongues as soon as possible, we took refuge in the first bunder-boat and made for the shore."

In the boiling heat the little party stood about on the quay, waiting for something to happen. Then someone went off to look for Hurrychund. Finally, Hurrychund arrived, out of breath, and explained that he was in a bunder-boat going out to the *Speke Hall* while they had been in another coming ashore. He escorted them to his own house, which was simple enough, with no running water or other Western amenities.

* * *

They had arrived in India at a time when public opinion was undergoing a great change. Previous to the Mutiny, 1857, or the Great Revolt as Nehru calls it, Indians had regarded the British—in the words of Trevelyan—as strange, invincible men who had dropped from the skies, more benevolent than the kings or gods they knew.* This was not surprising. Britain had unified and pacified India, had alleviated the terrible plight of the masses, had brought to India English education with all its revolutionary effects. At the demands of the Protestant missionaries, the British Government had carried out far-reaching reforms, such as the abolition of slavery and of *suttee* (the ghastly rite of burning the live widow, often a mere girl, alongside her husband's dead body), the outlawing of *thuggee* or ritual strangling of travellers (the thugs were devotees of Kali, goddess of destruction), human sacrifices, and other horrors.† Englishmen risked death to save widows from the funeral pyres. But by the 1870s, the educated classes of India were no longer content to be docile pupils of the West.‡ The impact of Western culture on the medieval, static society of India had given rise, inevitably, to Indian nationalism.

Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott landed in Bombay at

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*G. M. Trevelyan, *History of England.*

†J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India,* 1915.

‡*Ibid.*

the turn of the tide, a tide which they caught at the flood, for they had come glorifying the Vedas and Mother India, and with a disparaging and even abusive attitude to the British Raj. Colonel Olcott actually sank to his knees and kissed the stone of the quayside on his arrival. No Westerners had ever come to India with quite the same point of view.

On their second day in India, a reception was held in their honour. Three hundred people waited to greet them in a hall which is described as a photographic studio, and threw garlands round their necks. H.P.B., the Colonel, Wimbridge, and an Irishman called Scott, who had travelled with the theosophists from Liverpool and been persuaded to join the Society, replied to the welcoming speeches.

The Colonel was deeply moved by such enthusiasm and love. "The occasion fairly brought the water to my eyes," he wrote in his journal. "The long-expected moment comes at last, and I am face to face with my spiritual kinsmen."

The crowds with their strange costumes, the painted and ash-besmeared Sannyasis or penitents in painful postures, the hordes of children, the sweetmeat vendors, the troupes of jugglers, are some of the details which caught the Colonel's eager eye as he wandered about in the blazing sunshine beneath the azure sky.

The next day they witnessed the feast called *Shivaratri* or Shiva's Night. Then they explored the ancient caves, and gazed at the giant sculptures, and the huge, paint-smeared lingams (outsize stone figures of the male generative organ), holiest of symbols, ever dripping with oblations.

This was India, a land overflowing with spirituality, difficult for the Western, Greek-trained mind to understand, and confused by the seemingly sensuous images.

In increasing numbers, visitors came to see these Western members of the Arya Samaj, and brought presents of fruit. The Colonel was enchanted when a Jain monk, with shaved crown, and body naked to the waist, questioned him on religion through an interpreter.

The long Hindu drama *Sitaram* was performed in their honour: they arrived at the Elphinstone Theatre at 9 p.m., and at 2.45 a.m., unable to bear any more of it, they rose to leave. The performance stopped, and Hurrychund went on to the stage and read an address of welcome.* The following evening, as a climax so to speak to these celebrations, Hurrychund, the President of the Bombay Arya Samaj, presented the bill.

The good Colonel was staggered, and Madame Blavatsky used some of the language which the Colonel elsewhere calls discreetly "iron-clad".

"The bloom was off the plum: our supposed hospitable entertainer put in an enormous bill for rent, food, attendance, repairs to the house, even the hire of the three hundred chairs used at our reception, and the cost of a cablegram he had sent us, bidding us hasten our coming! The total made my eyes stare; for, at that rate, we should soon find ourselves with empty pockets. And it had been given out and generally understood that we were this person's guests! Protests came, one thing led to another, and we finally discovered that the considerable sum of over six hundred rupees (not then a vanishing silver disc but a substantial valuable token) which we had sent through him to the Arya Samaj, had got no further than his hand, and a precious clamour arose among his Samajist colleagues. I shall never forget the scene when H.P.B., at a meeting of the Arya Samaj, let loose at him the bolts of her scorn, and forced him to promise restitution."

They began to look for a house for themselves, found a cottage at half the rent that Hurrychund had proposed to charge them, bought furniture, and moved in on 7 March. The address was: 108 Girgaum Back Road.

Their good friend, Moolji Thackersey, brought them a fifteen-year-old boy called Babula, who could speak English and French besides Hindustani and other languages. His last job was said to have been that of an assistant to a conjurer. H.P.B. liked his face and engaged him as her personal servant.

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*G. M. Williams, *Priestess of the Occult*, 1946.

The Lamasery in New York had been exchanged for a primitive cottage, but the evening conversations with their Hindu and Parsee friends, who continued to flock round to see them, were of the same high tone, and even wider in range. "The Soul," said the Colonel pithily, "was the burning topic of debate." Questions of politics, colour, and the inequalities of wealth were not even mentioned. For the first time, they became absorbed in the problems of reincarnation and the progress of the soul towards liberation (*moksha*). They had landed in India and retired into the native quarter without even stopping to leave cards at Government House. Of course, the newspapers had reported their arrival, but as the Colonel said, they were completely happy in their cottage under the cocoa-palms, indifferent to the rivalries of officialdom, the agonizing strife of the share markets, the arrivals and departures of wealth-laden steamers. But this idyllic existence could not go on for ever. They had not come to India to dream, but to work, to build up their Theosophical Society, and earn their living by some means. H.P.B. could make a little money from journalism, and the Colonel by importing alarm-clocks and exporting tiger skins, ivories, curios.

In April, H.P.B., Moolji and the Colonel left for a trip to Karli, a day's train journey from Bombay, to see the celebrated Buddhist temple there, carved out of the solid rock of the Western Ghats. They took Babula with them. The last stage of the journey, up a path from the foot of the hill in the blazing sunshine, was too much for H.P.B. who, the Colonel says, was distressed for breath, so coolies carried her in a chair and set her down before the magnificent façade of the great *chaitya* or sanctuary, as large as a Gothic cathedral. The walls are decorated with pillars at short intervals, surmounted by elaborately carved figures. It was begun in the first century B.C. Tired by their climb, the theosophists went inside and, in the ghostly light which streamed through the windows, spread out a blanket and opened their picnic basket. H.P.B. told them that in one of the small sanctuaries a secret door communicated with other sanctuaries in the heart of the mountain, where a school of Adepts still lived, but whose existence was not even suspected by the public at large. There is a sequel to this story.

"Moolji and Babula had gone to the village bazaar to buy provisions," wrote the Colonel, "and H.P.B. and I were left alone. We sat in the porch smoking and chatting, until she bade me stop where I was for a few minutes and not look around until she told me. She then passed inside the cave, as I thought to go into one of the cubicles for a nap on the rock-hewn block that served as the old monk's bed. I kept on smoking and looking over the wide landscape that lay before me like a great map, when suddenly, from within the cave, I heard a sound like the slamming of a heavy door and a burst of satirical laughter. Naturally I turned my head, but H.P.B. had disappeared. She was in neither of the cells, which I examined in detail, nor could I, with the minutest search over every inch of the rocky surfaces of their walls, find the least crack or other sign of a door. . . . I soon ceased to bother myself about the mystery and returned to the porch and my pipe, in placid inclination to wait for what might happen.

"A half-hour had passed since her disappearance, when I heard a footstep just behind me and was addressed by H.P.B. in person, in a natural tone, as if nothing had happened out of the common. In reply to my question as to where she had been, she simply said she had 'had business' with . . . [mentioning the Adept] and gone to see him in his secret chambers. Curiously enough, she held in her hand a rusty old knife of a strange pattern, which she said she had picked up in one of the masked passages, and purposelessly had brought along. She would not let me keep it, but flung it out into the air with all her force, and I saw it fall into a thicket far down the hillside."

They spent the night rolled in blankets on the floor of the porch, warmed by a wood fire which also kept away the jackals. Towards the evening of the next day, after further explorations in the sanctuaries, H.P.B. told the Colonel that she had received a telepathic communication from an Adept to the effect that they should go to Rajputana in the Punjab. In the morning they returned to Bombay. The Colonel, H.P.B. and Moolji had a second-class carriage to themselves; Babula was in a third-class carriage.

Moolji was stretched out asleep. The Colonel and H.P.B. were sitting side by side on the cross-bench.

"I do wish that Goolab Singh [the Adept] had not made me pass on verbally to you his message about Rajputana!" said H.P.B.

"Why?" asked the Colonel.

"Because Wimbridge and Miss Bates will think it all humbug, a trick to make you take me on a pleasant journey and leave them moping at home."

"Bosh!" said the Colonel. "I don't need anything more than your word for it."

"But I tell you," said H.P.B., "they will think hardly of me for it."

"Then it would have been far better if he had given you a note, which he could have done easily. Well, it's too late to worry about it now," commented the Colonel.

H.P.B. did not think it too late; and she brooded on the idea.

"Well, I shall try, anyhow," she said. "It's not too late." She took out her pocket-book and wrote: *Ask Goolab Singh to telegraph to Olcott the orders given him through me at the cave yesterday; let it be a test to others as well as to himself.*

She tore out the leaf, folded it into a triangular shape, inscribed some "peculiar symbolic signs" on it (which, she explained to the Colonel, dominated the elementals), held it between the thumb and forefinger of her left hand and threw it out of the window of the rushing train.

An hour after they had arrived back home, the Adept Goolab Singh replied by telegram: *Letter received. Answer Rajputana. Start immediately.*

And they did. On Good Friday, 11 April, H.P.B., the Colonel, their friend Moolji Thackersey, and their personal servant, Babula, set off northwards for the Punjab. Two days later they reached Allahabad, where they were met by Pandit Sunderlal, the chief disciple of Swami Dayananda. For the night they put up at the railway company's *dak* bungalow which stood within the station compound. The heat, observed the Colonel, was terrific and it made even Moolji catch his breath when he ventured outside.

They went to the bank of the River Jumna to see Babu Surdass, an old sannyasi or ascetic, who had been sitting there, on a low brick platform, without any covering for his head, rain or shine, since 1827, that is, for fifty-two years. He had sat through the Mutiny, paying no attention to the thundering cannon.

"On this day of our visit the sun blazed on us like a fierce fire, but his head was bare and yet he did not seem to feel any inconvenience. The whole day long he squats on his place and the whole night as well, save at midnight, when he goes to the confluence of the two sacred streams, Ganges and Jumna, to bathe and worship. The hardships of his protracted penance have made him blind and he has to be led to the riverside, yet his face wears a cheerful look, and his smile is frank and sweet. If New Yorkers will recall the features of the late Mr. George Jones, founder of the N.Y. *Times*, they will have an excellent idea of this Sikh sannyasi's appearance."

Through Moolji as an interpreter, the Colonel talked to him. Babu Surdass said that he was a hundred years old, which the Colonel seemed to doubt, but Babu pointed out that his fifty-two years on his pillar was a matter of history. He told these two visitors from the Western lands that only by keeping the mind calm and the soul unperturbed can one perceive truth: the image of the sun can be seen in smooth water alone.

The Colonel then asked him to do a phenomenon for them; in other words, to show them his powers of yoga. To this request, the sannyasi turned his sightless orbs towards the Colonel and replied sadly that the Wise Man never permitted his attention to be drawn aside from the search after the spirit by these playthings of the ignorant.

At Cawnpore the theosophists came on another sannyasi, whose stomach seemed to the Colonel to be in a state of collapse. His face took on an expression of disdain when he was asked to show them phenomena. He refused, but he did tell them of a sannyasi who had, more than once, performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes; and another sannyasi of his acquaintance, one Lukhi Bawa, had the power of turning water into ghee (clarified butter); and twenty years ago he himself had seen a sannyasi bring a felled tree back to its full vigour of branch and leaf.

Later in the day the Colonel and H.P.B. mounted an elephant and went off to find Lukhi Bawa. They found him at last in a nearby *ashram* or religious centre and the Colonel said that he was the image of John W. Mitchell, New York lawyer. Lukhi Bawa, too, declined to show them any phenomena.

They went on to Bhurtpore in Rajputana. The Maharajah was away, but his Dewan, or Finance Minister, gave them hospitality, talked to them about God, and invited them to visit the ancient palace of Sooraj Mullat Deegh, twenty-three miles away.

"Nine palaces, each bearing a different name of God, stand in a quadrangle around a shady garden. . . . The centre of the garden is marked with a domed marble water-kiosk, surrounded by a shallow tank from which rise 175 water-jets, met by streams that fall from an equal number of nozzles projecting from the underside of the cornice of the structure, and when in play shroud the occupants from view by a translucent wall of water which keeps the air within deliciously cool in the hottest day and sparkles in the sunshine like a silver veil embroidered with gems. From this centre, raised walks radiate in every direction and one strolls about under the cool shade of neem, tamarind, mango, babul, banyan, and pipul trees. No less than one hundred grand peacocks were strutting about on the day of our visit, swift parrots darted in emerald flashes through the air, striped squirrels flitted from tree to tree, and flocks of doves softly called to each other in dense foliage. . . . The palace architecture is all Indian, the carvings in stone exquisite in design, and the angles as sharp as if but finished yesterday. In the Zenana palace, Sooraj Mull, every room has a tessellated marble floor of a different design from the rest; the lintels and frames are in pure statuary marble, decorated with patterns of climbing vines in high relief. Yet, alas! amid all this beauty moral deformity rankly flourished, and we heard such stories of vulgar debauchery as prevalent in Bhurtpore and other Rajput towns, that we were glad to get away as soon as possible."

They returned to Bhurtpore and while sitting outside their bungalow in the evening an old white-robed Hindu came round the corner, salaamed, handed the Colonel a letter, and retired.

It was the Master Goolab Singh's reply to the Colonel's letter. "It was a beautifully worded and, to me, most important letter, inasmuch as it pointed out the fact that the surest way to seek the Masters was through the channel of faithful work in the Theosophical Society."

The Masters had chosen, we are told, Madame Blavatsky for their purpose—that of helping mankind, of revealing to them as much esoteric knowledge as they were capable of absorbing at that stage of their evolution.

The next stop was Jeypore, where they had an unfortunate experience. Instead of staying at a *dak* bungalow, they accepted the invitation of an uncle of the Maharajah to come to his palace. But the quarters assigned to them was an open shed on the palace roof, without bed, chair, table, mattress, or bath, and no food was supplied to them. And the first thing next morning their host sent for Moolji and, without a word of explanation, turned them all out. The Colonel was furious. It was all due, he explained, to the fact that the authorities thought they were Russian spies, and had a police officer trailing them.

They went on to Agra, where they gazed speechless at the dazzling white marble of the Taj Mahal, the sumptuous mausoleum which was built during the first half of the seventeenth century for Shah Jahan's favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal. "Words are absolutely inadequate to express the sensations felt by an aesthetic mind on entering the Taj garden through the splendid red-sandstone portal—itself a palace. Like a fair white dream it rises against the Indian lapis-lazuli sky of April, suggesting a spiritual world untainted with the dirt of this gross world. But enough: let it stand a world-wonder for future tourists—indescribable, unique, a marble thought."

They were getting nearer and nearer to the man they had left America to meet: Dayananda Sarasvati.

At Saharanpore, the Arya Samajists welcomed them most cordially and brought gifts of fruit and sweets, and the occasion was marred only by the presence of the police spy who dogged their footsteps, read their telegrams, and reminded H.P.B. of life back home in Tsarist Russia.

The Samaj gave them a formal reception, and a banquet, Indian fashion, at which they sat on the floor and ate with a washed right hand off leaf-plates. The Swami arrived at dawn next morning, and Moolji and the Colonel went to pay their respects. "I was," said the Colonel, "immensely impressed with his appearance, manners, harmonious voice, easy gestures, and personal dignity. He had just finished bathing at a well in a leafy grove. . . . Our greeting was most cordial. He took me by the hand, led me to an open-air cemented terrace, had an Indian cot brought and made me sit beside him. A few compliments being exchanged we took our leave, and after an hour or so he came to the *dak* bungalow and made H.P.B.'s acquaintance. In the long conversation which followed he defined his views on Nirvana, Moksha, and God in terms to which we could take no exception."

It is a pity that the Colonel should have been so brief about this meeting between Dayananda Sarasvati and Madame Blavatsky. It was one of those great moments in the history of occultism.

The following day the theosophists clambered aboard the train which was taking the Swami to Meerut. On their arrival they were invited to the house of Babu Sheonarain, a wealthy government contractor and Samajist. At 6.30 p.m. they went off to attend a crowded meeting of the Arya Samaj; it was held in a rectangular courtyard, surrounded by buildings, open to the sky. At one end was a brick platform, one hundred feet wide by fifty deep, covered with carpets and rugs; and in the centre, on a low dais, sat the Great Teacher. A rug was beneath his feet, pillows supported his back, a reading-stool and books were near by. In calm dignity he dominated the assembly, who waited in grave silence, broken only by the twittering of birds, for him to speak. After the theosophists had been conducted to their places, the Swami sunk his chin upon his breast, became abstracted for a few minutes, and then raising his face towards the sky intoned in a sweet voice:

"*Om*, *Om; Shantih*, *Shantih*, *Shantih!*"*

As the sounds died away, he began a discourse on the nature of prayer. He defined prayer as work. He had once heard a Brahmo Samajist† waste two hours repeating the words, "Thou, God, art all mercy and justice!" What good did that do? Some people talk to God as a man does to his sepoy. Useless folly! Let him who would pray effectively work, work, work! Everything that is beyond one's reach must be sought for by contemplation, and the development of spiritual powers.

The next morning the Colonel addressed the Samajists under a *shamianah* or painted canvas canopy erected in the grounds of Sheonarain's house. He was provided, he tells us, with a table, and the few Europeans present had chairs to sit on, but the

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**Om* or *aum* is an untranslatable word which has nevertheless been translated as God, the Supreme Being. It is *the* Sacred Word, a mantram not to be sounded save when the mind is pure. *Shantih* means peace in the spiritual sense.

†A member of the theist society founded by the reformer Ram Mohun Roy, the first Indian to realize the good his country could reap from Britain and Christianity. "I have found," he wrote, "the doctrines of Christ more conducive to moral principles, and better adapted to the use of rational beings, than any others which have come to my knowledge." He died in Bristol in 1833. His full-length portrait by H. P. Briggs hangs in the Bristol Museum.

Swami and his followers sat on the ground, which was covered with *durries* or cotton carpets. Among the English officials the Colonel recognized the police spy, in spite of his having removed his moustache. The Colonel's remarks were devoted to pointing out the mutual benefits to be derived from a blending of the gifts of East and West, views which the Swami, who was impressed by Western technology, was doubtless in agreement with.

The Swami told Madame Blavatsky and the Colonel that, in his youth, he had spent seven years naked (except for a breech-cloth) in the jungle, sleeping on the ground, eating what he could pick up, until his body became insensible to heat and cold and cuts and burns. Among tigers and deadly serpents he went unharmed. Once he crossed the path of a hungry bear who rose to him, but he waved her off with a gesture of his hand. On Mount Abu he met an Adept called Bhavani Gihr who could, he said, drink a whole bottle of poison, of which one drop would have killed an ordinary person; this Adept could with ease fast for forty days and do many other extraordinary things.

On 7 May the theosophists turned their faces homewards. They were escorted to the station by the Swami and a large number of his followers, who flung roses after them, and shouted their words of friendship as the train moved off.

[illegible]

Chapter Fourteen

SUCCESS

THE Colonel began to dress like a Brahmin in two pieces of long cotton cloth, one for his shoulders, the other for his loins, and to wear sandals on his bare feet. In place of the triple cord, which a member of this caste wears from the left shoulder to the right hip, he slung a thin gold chain which he borrowed from his "chum". Sometimes he wore just a dhoti. H.P.B. did not carry her enthusiasm for India to the extent of altering her Western dress. She was even at times critical of native customs, as this account shows.

During May, 1879, she and Miss Bates and the Colonel paid a visit to a Deccanee Sirdar, that is, a high-ranking gentleman of the Deccan area, for the purpose of being introduced to the Chief Justice of Baroda, who presumably wanted to meet them. After the Chief Justice had departed and they themselves were about to go, their host, the Sirdar, excused himself from the room for a moment, and on his return he led in a pretty child of ten, dressed in a costly silk sari and jacket, her ebony coloured hair almost hidden by gold ornaments. Heavy jewels were in her ears, round her neck, wrists and ankles and—to the Colonel's surprise—in one nostril she wore the jewelled ring which, in Bombay, is a token of marriage.

"H.P.B.'s face relaxed into a sweet smile as the child approached, but when the grey-bearded, white-haired noble, holding forward the girl's hand towards hers, said, 'Madame, allow me to present to you my little wife', the smile gave place to a frown, and in tones of inexpressible disgust she shouted: 'Your WIFE? You old beast! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!' We left the host trying to smile."

The rest of the year passed pleasantly enough, and only towards the end of November did a cloud appear on the horizon: a quarrel arose between H.P.B. and the English governess, Rosa Bates. The Colonel does not explain what, exactly, the quarrel was about; he tells us only that whereas he and H.P.B. were of absolutely one mind about the Masters, Miss Bates was not; she was of another mind about them. Was, therefore, the quarrel (which the Colonel compares to a cloud on the horizon) due to a disagreement as to the status of the Brothers of the White Lodge? The Colonel drops a vague hint. Miss Bates and Wimbridge are criticized merely for being "insular English at the core and Asiatic only in a thin superficial varnish", which does not seem to me to be a grievous fault. But the occasion makes the Colonel explain for the first time why Miss Bates and Mr. Wimbridge wished to accompany H.P.B. to India, and why H.P.B. agreed to take them with her: neither Bates nor Wimbridge had been able to make a success in America, and they wanted to try their luck elsewhere. The Colonel had seen no sense in taking them along: H.P.B.'s answer was that their company would afford "the best possible guarantee to the Anglo-Indian authorities of our innocence of any political designs".

This, then, was the cloud—a tiny one—on the horizon. There was also another, a larger and darker cloud, but they did not recognize it as such: the growing hostility of the Christian colleges and missionaries who naturally regarded the activities of these two renegade Christians with disapproval, and their growing success with alarm. This was made clear as early as 18 May, 1879, when the Colonel spoke for the first time before the Bombay Arya Samaj. It was an open-air meeting and the attendance was a large one. The editor of the Marathi organ of the Presbyterian Mission, a clergyman, was present: the Colonel picked him out, and challenged him to come forward "and make good certain slanderous innuendoes that he had permitted himself to put forward against our characters". A rather unseemly scene followed.

In August of the same year, H.P.B. received a letter from an old friend of hers, Madame Coulomb, whom she had known in Cairo during 1872, and who now appeared in Ceylon; but one could not, at that time, have conceived of her as a cloud on the horizon, and not even later when she had joined the theosophists, until she loomed very large indeed and became a cloudburst over Madame Blavatsky's head.

But overhead the sky was azure blue, and H.P.B. and the Colonel continued to make friends and influence people: the Society slowly expanded, and with the appearance on 1 October of their magazine, *The Theosophist*, into which they had sunk their capital, their activities gained much greater momentum. The first number of this monthly magazine, which was devoted—so the sub-title tells us—to Oriental Philosophy, Art, Literature, and Occultism, contained the first instalment of the autobiography of the Great Teacher, Dayananda Sarasvati. Other articles were: a Statement as to what Theosophy is; the Antiquity of the Vedas, the Sacred Books; the Drift of Western Spiritualism, a subject which the editor, Madame Blavatsky, knew so well; Learning Among Indian Ladies; Technical Education by Wimbridge, who pointed out that India must industrialize herself to escape from the humiliation of exporting raw materials and importing at heavy cost the goods made from these same raw materials; a review of Sir Edwin Arnold's celebrated poem on the Buddha, *The Light of Asia*, etc. It was a very good issue, full of fascinating stuff, and was entirely successful; the four hundred copies, which had been the timid print order, sold out within a few days. This was more than encouraging; this was a sign of success. The print order for the following month was larger, by how many we are not told, but that sold out too; and by the time the fourth number had appeared and sold out in the beginning of 1880, they had even made a profit; they had turned the corner. Tiger skins and alarm-clocks, by which the Colonel had hoped to earn a living, were forgotten. They had established theosophy on the firm soil of India; and they had established themselves.

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On 2 December, H.P.B., the Colonel, Babula, and a young Brahmin of wealthy parents, Damodar K. Mavalankar, a lantern-jawed, lanky youth, with legs like two lead pencils, left by train for Allahabad. They were going to visit Alfred Percy Sinnett, the editor of the leading daily newspaper in India, *The Pioneer*.

The photograph of Sinnett reveals a bald, unworldly-wise young man with a great moustache which gives his chin a weak appearance. When Madame Blavatsky arrived at Bombay, he had been the editor of *The Pioneer* for eight years. Her name was not new to him; he had read of her in spiritualist papers, and his London friends had told him that *Isis Unveiled* was an extraordinary work which opened up vistas beyond spiritualism. He wrote in his paper an appreciative notice of her, and suggested that she had come to India in search of new varieties of mediumship. The Colonel, who was looking for contacts, promptly replied.

One evening shortly afterwards, while Alfred Sinnett and his wife, Patience, were out for a drive in the cool of the evening, and the talk had entered upon the subject of Madame Blavatsky and her companion, Colonel Olcott, Patience suddenly said, "Let's invite them to stay with us when they come up country."

Thus, on the morning of 4 December, H.P.B. and company were met at the Allahabad station by Alfred Sinnett with his barouche and pair, coachman and two footmen.

The Colonel begins his account of the Sinnetts by saying that Mrs. Sinnett received them most charmingly, and that before she had spoken half a dozen sentences it was clear to him that they had won "a friendship beyond price". A. P. Sinnett's account of this event—it was written after both Madame Blavatsky and the Colonel were dead—gives a few more details and, lacking the sweet effusiveness of *Old Diary*

Leaves, paints a sharper picture. This is what Sinnett says.

When the barouche brought them to the house in the early morning, the Sinnetts had not yet had their breakfast, which was about to be served on the verandah.

They sat down at the table, and, to get a good current going, H.P.B. plunged into the subject of spiritualism, and asked Mr. Sinnett if he and his wife had been making any experiments.

"We've tried, but without any results—not even a rap," said Sinnett.

"Oh, raps are the easiest things to get," replied H.P.B., and put her hand on the table.

Raps about the table were at once heard.

At that moment Patience emerged from the bedroom. She came on to the verandah, and greeted her guests with a smile.

The following day Allan Octavian Hume and his wife called. "If Mr. Hume has any objection against the Vedas, he should publish it in a newspaper," wrote Swami Dayananda in his autobiography at the beginning of *Satyarth Prakash*. I don't suppose Mr. Hume had. He was a Companion of the Bath—a rather humble decoration which he received in 1860 for his heroism during the Indian Mutiny—and an authority on Asiatic birds. The first two volumes of his—and C. H. T. Marshall's—monumental *The Game Birds of India*, *Burmah*, *and Ceylon* had just appeared, with copious coloured illustrations. At this time, according to his biographer, Wedderburn, he was under a cloud; for nine years he had held the high appointment of Secretary to the Government of India in the department of Revenue, Commerce and Agriculture, a most important department in a country prone to famines; but in 1879, that is the year previous to his meeting Madame Blavatsky, his career was cut short. Wedderburn says that this was owing to over-boldness in expressing unpalatable opinions.

Hume had a vision of a united Indian nation, and, a year after Swami Dayananda's death in 1883, he conceived the idea of the Indian National Congress. As he had by then retired from the Civil Service and given his birds' eggs to the British

Museum, he was able to devote his energies to this cause, which bore fruit in December, 1890, when it was officially recognized. Of course Congress, of which he is rightly called the Father, grew into something which he had not quite anticipated, but this is the usual fate of all great initiators.

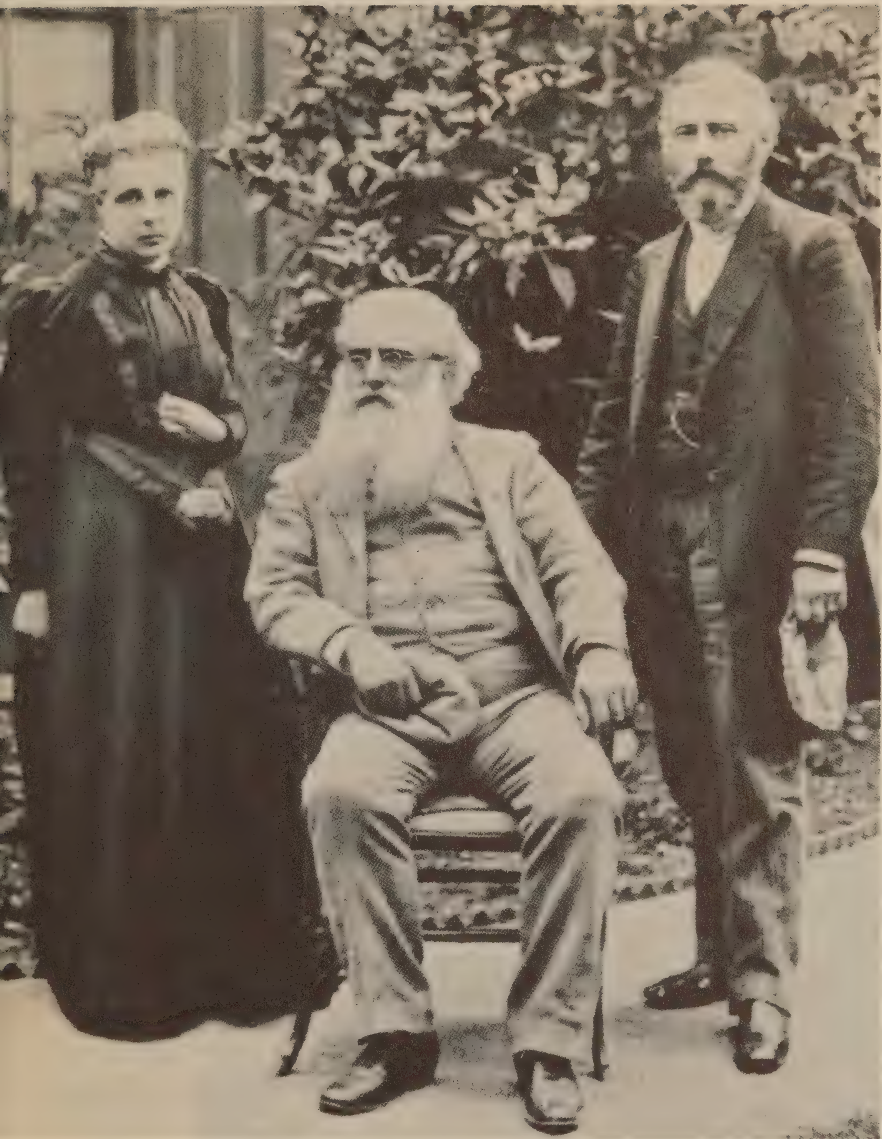
Hume's father was Joseph Hume (1777-1855), who was one of the leaders of the radical party in the House of Commons; that is to say, he was on the extreme left of the Liberal Party: he was to the Liberal Party what Messrs. Fenner Brockway and Sidney Silverman are to the Labour Party today. Joseph Hume advocated the extension of the franchise, free trade, cosmopolitanism. And he wanted to see the abolition of taxes on the press, floggings in the navy, press-gangs and other miseries.

* * *

The day passed pleasantly enough, and the Sinnetts were pleased with their guests. In her diary, Patience described H.P.B. as an original old woman who promised great amusement. And then an incident occurred which created an unfavourable impression.

They were sitting by the fire in the evening—a fire to gaze at, Sinnett explains, was pleasant around Christmas—and the talk was about magic. The Colonel had told of some of H.P.B.'s magical practices in New York. It was soon suggested that H.P.B. did some magic there and then, and Sinnett, on the spur of the moment, asked her to materialize a cigar-holder. H.P.B. did so after a few gestures and the rubbing of the Colonel's pipe between her hands, simply by bringing one out of her pocket. As an exhibition of "magic" the whole performance was childish, and the Sinnetts looked at each other in acute embarrassment. Had they, they asked themselves, fallen into the hands of a charlatan? They did think that the raps she produced were quite genuine, and evidence of more than the powers of ordinary mediumship, but they were distrustful of her powerful personality which was drawing them close.

During the middle of the month the theosophists accom-



Annie Besant, Colonel Olcott and William Q. Judge, the leaders of the Theosophical Society after Madame Blavatsky's death in 1891

Countess Constance Wachtmeister, Madame Blavatsky's devoted companion

The last photograph of Madame Blavatsky. She is holding *The Secret Doctrine*

panied the Sinnetts to the holy city of Benares, about seventy miles away. They stayed in the Ananda Bagh, a small palace, surrounded by a high-walled garden, belonging to the Maharajah of Vizianagram. Swami Dayananda was also a guest there, and they had the pleasure of seeing him again. He was emaciated, having been stricken meanwhile with cholera.

Sinnett and H.P.B. discussed phenomena. If, argued Sinnett, she had only a limited amount of psychic force to expend on phenomena, then she should produce phenomena exclusively before scientists under convincing test conditions. H.P.B. disagreed angrily. The Colonel took Sinnett's side in this matter.

The following day, they called on a female ascetic called Majji, who told H.P.B. that her, H.P.B.'s, body was occupied by a yogi, and that he had been sitting inside her for sixty-two years. The Colonel, always impartial where truth was concerned, observed that Majji had overshot the mark here, for H.P.B. was only forty-eight.

In the afternoon the Sinnetts went back home, leaving the theosophists in the care of the Maharajah, or rather of his *munshi* (secretary).

On 21 December the Literary Society of Benares Pandits, i.e. learned men, convened a meeting in the Colonel's honour. The President, Ram Misra Shastri, conducted the smiling Colonel, with every mark of courtesy, to his seat. "Coming in from the glare of the sunshine, it took me a little time for my eyes to get accustomed to the dim light of the brick-paved, cool room, in which a fine scent of sandalwood and tuberose blooms hung in the air. Amid a perfect silence, broken only by muffled sounds of rumbling vehicles and the jangling brass disks of ekkas,* that came from the distant street, addresses of

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*The sorcerer Aleister Crowley, many of whose ideas were derived from Madame Blavatsky, was in India in 1902 and 1905, and rode in ekkas. He describes them thus: "These are contraptions which suggest a hansom cab with the back knocked out and the driver on the floor, as it might have been conceived by the man who invented the coracle. Even one European finds it impossible to get a comfortable seat or stretch his legs, and a second constitutes outrageous overcrowding. A party of eight or ten natives, on the other hand, finds itself at ease." *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, 1929.

welcome were read to me in English, Sanskrit, and Hindi, expressive of the pleasure the Pandits of Benares had felt on hearing of the interest taken by our Society in Sanskrit Literature and Indian Philosophy; bidding me heartily welcome, and promising their lasting sympathy and goodwill."

In his reply the Colonel pointed out what an immense service the Benares Pandits could render to Literature and the cause of Aryan learning by inventing Sanskrit equivalents for Greek and Latin scientific terms.

From this meeting the Colonel went to pay his respects to Professor George Friedrich Wilhelm Thibaut, the German Sanskrit scholar and Principal of Benares College, whose translations of the *Vedânta-Sutras* can be found in three volumes of *The Sacred Books of the East*, edited by Max Muller. Later, the learned professor, various pandits, Swami Dayananda, Madame Blavatsky, the Colonel and others went outside and sat on chairs and a large carpet under the glorious Indian moon and talked religion and philosophy.

At last some of the pandits left, and the rest of the company, still continuing the discussion, went inside the college building. Thibaut said in his heavy German accent that the pandits had told him that the *rishis* (sages) of old could perform phenomena, for they had developed the *siddhis* (powers) of yoga; yes, they could do marvellous things, make roses fall from the sky for example.

"Oh, they say that, do they?" said H.P.B. addressing the solid and scientifically-minded professor whose short hair stood up like spikes all over his head. "They say no one can do it now? Well, I'll show them; and you may tell them from me that if the modern Hindus were less sycophantic to their Western masters, less in love with their vices, and more like their ancestors in many ways, they would not have to make such a humiliating confession, nor get an old Western hippopotamus of a woman to prove the truth of their Shastras!"

Then, setting her lips together and muttering something, she swept her right hand through the air with an imperious gesture, and wham! On the heads of the company, which included Dayananda Sarasvati, fell a dozen roses.

After the scramble for the roses, the conversation continued, but this was not the end of the evening's surprises.

As Dr. Thibaut was leaving, the Colonel accompanied him to the exit, with Damodar following with a lamp in his hand—a student's reading-lamp with shade, vertical rod for the body of the lamp to slide upon, and a ring at the top to carry it by. H.P.B. also left her seat.

The Colonel was holding up a curtain to let the Doctor out, and saying a few last words, when he saw "on H.P.B.'s face that strange look of power which almost always preceded a phenomenon".

She took the lamp from Damodar's hand, held it by a finger of her left hand, looked fixedly at it, pointed at it with her right forefinger, and in an imperious tone of voice said: "Go up!"

The flame rose and rose till it came to the top of the chimney.

"Go down!"

It descended slowly.

"Go up!"

The obedient flame again did as it was told.

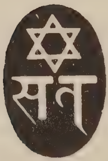
Later, Madame Blavatsky explained that it was only an invisible Mahatma (one of the Hidden Chiefs) turning the lamp up and down, nothing more. But the Colonel was inclined to reject this explanation. In his view, it was Madame Blavatsky's control over the elementals: an elemental, one of those tricksy little beings, was on the job.

The Sinnetts had invited the theosophists to stay with them for a few days, but they were still there at the end of December—that is, almost a month later; but by this time the disagreeable impression of the materialization of the cigar-holder had faded. H.P.B. was a colourful personality who enlivened the Sinnetts' dinner parties with her conversation, and who cast a mysterious glow over herself by her talk about the Mahatmas.

Something began to stir in them and, with a little reluctance, they asked to join the Society.

The Sinnetts called her the Old Lady, which was abbreviated to O.L. They were, of course, struck by her downright, eccentric behaviour, which they thought a little lacking in taste. One evening, after the Colonel had lectured on "Theosophy and Its Relations to India" to a crowded audience, with Mr. Hume in the chair, and as they were all returning in the carriage, H.P.B. attacked the Colonel bitterly, as if, Sinnett commented, he had ruined her life's ambition: she had left her shawl behind and blamed him—petty miseries of life, from which even theosophists, it seems, are not immune.

"Do you think," the Colonel said to Sinnett afterwards, "that I would stand going about with that mad Frenchwoman if I did not know what lies behind her."



Her seal ring

Chapter Fifteen

MADAME COULOMB

On 28 March, 1880, the fatal Madame Coulomb and her dull husband arrived at the theosophists' door. They had come from Ceylon, at Madame Blavatsky's invitation. The Colonel says that the French Consul and other charitable persons had paid their fares.

A little over four years later, Madame Coulomb sat down and wrote *Some Account of my Intercourse with Madame Blavatsky from 1872 to 1884*. It is a rare and curious pamphlet of 112 pages, written by someone who is unused to writing pamphlets. Its style is that of a chattering scold, indignant, artless. Most of the events described in it are disputed, but it does thrust back the curtain a little, so that we can see something of Madame Blavatsky in 1872, that is the year previous to her going to America.

1872. And Madame Coulomb was walking pensively through a street in Cairo called *Sekke el Ghamma el Harmar*, the Street of the Red Mosque. Suddenly a woman with an unusual face, full, moon-shaped, swiftly brushed by her. "Who is that lady?" she asked a passer-by.

"She is the Russian spiritist who calls the dead, and makes them answer your questions," was the reply.

Thus Madame Coulomb, who at that time was Miss Emma Cutting, an Englishwoman, begins her account of her intercourse with Madame Blavatsky.

She was, she says, overjoyed to hear of someone who could get in touch with the dead, for she was mourning the loss of her brother who had died recently. The mere mention of a necromancer was "tidings of great joy", and she describes the thought of being able to hear her brother's voice again—not that any ordinary spiritist or necromancer would enable her to do that—as "heavenly delight".

She learnt that the secretary of the *Société Spirite*, a Greek whom she happened to know, could introduce her to this Russian lady. She called on him, and he did introduce her to Madame Blavatsky, and Madame Blavatsky, in response to her request, put on a séance for her, but it was hardly successful. Miss Cutting did not hear her dead brother's voice, neither did she receive any message from him. She heard only a few raps. When she told the secretary, her Greek friend, of her disappointment, he replied that the spirits did not like to appear in a room which had not been purified and was not used exclusively for that purpose. If she would return in a few days, she would see wonders: they were preparing at that moment a closet in which only séances would take place. In due course Emma Cutting saw this closet, found that the walls and ceiling were lined with red cloth, fixed presumably to a frame, with a space behind of about three inches.

Later, she called again, and found, to her great surprise, the room full of people using the most offensive language about Madame Blavatsky. They said that she had taken their money and left them only with this—they pointed at the space between the red cloth and the wall "where several pieces of twine were still hanging which had served to pull through the ceiling a long glove stuffed with cotton, which was to represent the materialized hand and arm of some spirit".

The crowd, said Emma Cutting, was "as red as fire" and ready to knock Madame Blavatsky down, if she should appear.

When, some days later, she accidentally met the Russian spiritualist, she sadly asked her how she came to do such a thing.

"It's all Madame Sebire's doing," replied H.P.B., blaming her companion, with whom she shared an apartment.

Miss Cutting saw that Madame Blavatsky was very unhappy, so she let the matter drop. The following day she called on her, and learnt that she was very hard up. "I gave her pecuniary help," she said, "and continued doing so for some time"—until, presumably, H.P.B. left Egypt for Russia. (Madame Coulomb said she went back to Russia.)

A year later, Emma Cutting married Alexis Coulomb, and almost immediately afterwards they lost all their money. They left Egypt and went to Calcutta, an event which Madame Coulomb, who had a sense of drama, describes as being as comfortable as landing in the middle of the ocean after drifting hundreds of miles in a balloon. In Calcutta she taught French and Italian to several ladies belonging to the élite of society, but, on account of the climate, her health broke down. An opportunity then arose for her to go to Ceylon—to meet there a woman who was coming from Europe, and to accompany her to Calcutta. She went to Galle in Ceylon, and stayed at a small hotel, the *Hôtel de l'Univers*, run by an old Frenchwoman who, tired of the hotel business and thinking that Madame Coulomb had plenty of money, offered to sell it to her.

The woman from Europe arrived at last and off they went to Calcutta; but when Madame Coulomb got back home, she found that she had lost most of her pupils—they had gone to the hills for a breath of cool air. Then the old Frenchwoman in Galle wrote to her and offered again to sell her the *Hôtel de l'Univers*, this time at a much lower price. Madame Coulomb accepted, sold up, and went with her husband to Galle. The *Hôtel de l'Univers* failed.

A kind Singhalese gentleman set them up in another hotel, one opposite, but this, too, failed. They went up country to grow European vegetables, but the soil was barren.

"So now we had exhausted all ways of obtaining a quiet livelihood, and were in this unhappy position when we read in the Ceylon *Times* that Madame Blavatsky, accompanied by an American Colonel and an English gentleman and a lady, had arrived in Bombay and had founded a Theosophical Society there."

Full of hope, Madame Coulomb sat down and wrote a long letter to her spiritist friend, telling her of her misfortunes, and the plight she was now in.

In her reply H.P.B. gave an account of her life and successes since the fiasco of the red closet in the street called *Abdeen*. "My lodge in India," she wrote, "had decided that as the Society established by myself and old Sebire was a failure, I had to go to America and establish one on a larger scale."

This was pleasant enough to hear, but it solved none of Madame Coulomb's difficulties; so after a while she wrote again, and asked Madame Blavatsky to send her some money.

To this H.P.B. replied that she herself was as poor as a church mouse, and that none of them, except the Colonel, had any money. The Colonel, however, was a fanatic "who will take his skin off" for a fellow member of the Theosophical Society.

Presumably by return post, Madame Coulomb asked for membership forms, signed them as soon as they arrived, and sent them off forthwith: now they were theosophists; but the Colonel did not send them any money, nor their fares to Bombay, where they had decided to go, to be near the successful theosophists; and it took them a long time to raise the fare money themselves.

After four days at sea, the Coulombs arrived at Bombay. M. Coulomb had a box of tools with him, and his wife a few rags of clothing. They engaged a room at a hotel, ate their dinner, and then took a tram to the terminus of Girgaum. As soon as H.P.B. caught sight of her old friend, Emma Cutting, she gave a loud cry of joy, and in her open-hearted way instantly asked them to stay with her.

"I need not here say how this offer consoled my afflicted heart," wrote Madame Coulomb. "I really thanked Providence for having given me the opportunity of doing her some good when in Egypt, which caused me to form an acquaintance which now was so useful to me. That evening we slept at the hotel, and the next day at noon we moved into the headquarters of the Theosophical Society. The first few days we were very happy indeed; the company was very agreeable and we thought ourselves in heaven."

After finding a job for M. Coulomb as a mechanic in a cotton mill, and turning over the housekeeping duties to Madame Coulomb, the Founders—as H.P.B. and the Colonel called themselves—departed for Ceylon. Wimbridge, Damodar and four other persons (two Hindus and two Parsees) came with them, all wearing badges which had been specially made for the occasion. They had been invited to go to Ceylon to spread the word by two Buddhist High Priests, one of whom was already a member of the Society.

They dropped anchor in Colombo Harbour on the morning of 16 May. A large boat came alongside, and they were greeted by one Mohattiwatti Gunananda, described as a Buddhist orator-priest, and others, who requested them to proceed to Galle where arrangements had been made for their reception. Before dawn the next day, they were anchored off Galle. Then the monsoon broke, and there was tremendous wind and rain. After breakfast, during a lull, they boarded a boat decorated with flowers, and made for the shore. On the jetty and along the beach a tremendous crowd was waiting for them. A great shout of "*Sadhoo! Sadhoo!*" ("Peace be unto you!") arose as they drew near, and a thousand flags were frantically waved to welcome them. A house in Galle had been put at their disposal, but so great was the crush round their carriages that they could hardly set off to it.

In this manner Madame Blavatsky, Colonel Olcott, Mr. Wimbridge, an English architect, and company began a tour of the island. The Colonel called it the prologue to a drama of excitement, the like of which he hadn't even dreamt of. He was not exaggerating. They were the first white people to come to Ceylon singing the praises of Buddhism and treating the Christian missionaries, who were part of the ruling society, as their especial enemies. Without knowing it, they had kindled the flame of Singhalese nationalism. It was not surprising that they were carried in triumph about the island, cheered and blessed and pressed by vast crowds. The Colonel writes about the tour in detail, tells us of the speeches he made in large halls packed to suffocation, of the professional sorcerers who put on devil dances for them, of their not having a free moment, of the newspapers being full of stories about them, and so on and so forth; but what we should like to know he does not mention, namely, whether he and his "chum" ever asked themselves if the inhabitants of Ceylon had gone mad, or if they really believed they were worthy of this reception. After all, only a short time before—a little over a year—they were sitting in the Lamasery in New York wondering what had happened to the Theosophical Society.

In their enthusiasm for Buddhism, and out of sympathy for its tenets, they went into a temple on 25 May, knelt down before a huge statue of the Lord Buddha, and "took *pansil*" or the Five Precepts—that is to say, they became converts to Buddhism. As H.P.B. and the Colonel repeated in Pali after the aged High Priest Bulatgama the formula "I take refuge in Buddha! I take refuge in religion! I take refuge in truth!" the great crowd which was present made the responses just after them. The Five Precepts which they swore to observe are—to abstain from theft; to abstain from lying; to abstain from taking life; to abstain from intoxicating drinks; and to abstain from adultery. At the conclusion of the ceremony, Bulatgama asked the Colonel to deliver a brief discourse, which he did.

The climax of the tour was reached when they received, at Kandy, a ceremonial visit from the chief priests of two temples, very high-ranking *bhikkus*, and, later, as an especial honour, the massive door of the tower of the temple, in which the Buddha's Tooth is kept, was unlocked, and the precious relic exposed to their gaze.

"The relic is the size of an alligator tooth, is supported by a gold wire stem rising from a lotus flower of the same metal, and is much discoloured by age," wrote the Colonel with detachment. "If genuine it would, of course, be twenty-five centuries old. When not exhibited it is wrapped in pure sheet gold, placed in a golden case, just large enough to contain it, and covered externally with emeralds, diamonds, and rubies. This again is placed in a small golden *karandua* or dome, encrusted with precious stones; this in a large one of the same precious metal, similarly enriched; this in a third; this in a fourth dome of like value; finally, this one rests in a still larger one of thick silver plates, five feet four-and-a-half inches high and nine feet ten inches in circumference."

The Colonel had his doubts about the authenticity of the tooth. It bears, he says, no resemblance to any tooth at all, and the Buddhist attempt to get over this objection by explaining that "they were giants in those days" he would not accept. He refers to J. Gerson Da Cunha's account of the history of the tooth (*Memoir on the History of the Tooth-Relic of Ceylon*, 1875), in which it is related that the Portuguese, in 1560, took it with other spoils from a temple, and under the direction of the Inquisition pounded it in a mortar, burnt the remains and flung the ashes with the charcoal into the river before the awe-struck multitude.

"Of course it's his tooth," commented H.P.B. afterwards. "One he had when he was born as a tiger!"

The tour lasted two months, during which the word of theosophy was spread so effectively that many persons joined the Society, and not a few new branches were established.

Chapter Sixteen

THE TEACUP PHENOMENON

When the theosophists arrived back home, they found a fine state of tension waiting for them. Miss Bates was accusing Madame Coulomb of having tried to poison her. What Miss Bates had tried to do to Madame Coulomb in return we are not told, but it was certainly something dire: the two ladies were tearing out each other's hair.

The good Colonel was called upon to arbitrate, and he decided that Madame Coulomb had not tried to poison Miss Bates. (It was all his fault, really, for having taken the housekeeping duties away from Miss Bates and given them to Madame Coulomb. He should have realized that this would cause friction. The sub-editorship of *The Theosophist*, which he'd given to Miss Bates instead, had hardly satisfied her.)

There was a lull for a day or two; then the quarrelling flared up again and grew worse. There was nothing for it: the two parties would have to be separated permanently. The Coulombs moved from their adjoining compound into Miss Bates's quarters, and Miss Bates moved into the compound, and Wimbridge went with her.

On the very day that the household was split, H.P.B. and the Colonel received an invitation to visit the Sinnetts at Simla in the Punjab. "It was like a draught of sweet water to the caravan," said the Colonel, exasperated by this untheosophical behaviour. H.P.B. was so eager to get away that she telegraphed her acceptance.

On 27 August, 1880, they caught the evening mail train, taking Babula with them. On the 30th, after a halt at Allahabad, they reached Meerut. The entire local branch of the Arya

Samaj greeted them at the station, and escorted them to the residence of Mr. Sheonarain.

Shortly after their arrival, Dayananda Sarasvati called. He was feeling rather annoyed with the theosophists for having turned themselves into Buddhists. If he had known they were going to do that sort of thing, he certainly wouldn't have agreed to the amalgamation of their society with his Arya Samaj, a strictly Hindu organization.

Through an interpreter, for the Swami couldn't speak English, the Colonel asked him if yoga was a real science, and if one could obtain *siddhis* (miraculous powers) by its use, or was it merely a system of metaphysical speculation?

The Great Teacher replied that the claims of yoga were true, and were based upon the laws of nature.

H.P.B. was no less eager to hear what Dayananda had to say about yoga, a subject which went to the heart of the matter, for it enables one to transcend physical limitations and produce "phenomena" *ad libitum*. But she probably sat still and said nothing, for it was not the habit of the Swami to talk to women.

It was then asked—the Colonel was not, it seems, the only person questioning the Swami—if these powers could still be acquired. The sages of old (the *rishis*) could do anything, of course, for they were more or less divine.

Dayananda replied that the laws of nature are unchangeable and without limit. What had been done before could be done again. He personally could teach the methods to any sincere person who wished to become a yogi. But yoga is the most difficult science of all to learn, and few men are capable of it.

The next question brought the subject down to earth a little: what specific powers has the proficient yogi got?

The answer was that the true yogi can do that which the vulgar call miracles. It is pointless to make a list, for his powers are practically unlimited. Dayananda then mentioned several: the adept in yoga can exchange thoughts with a brother yogi at any distance; he can read the thoughts of others; he can pass in his inner self (i.e. not in his corporeal body) from one place to another and at incalculable speeds; in his corporeal body he can walk upon the water or in the air (i.e. he can levitate or fly like St. Joseph of Copertino); he can prolong his life beyond the normal span; he can pass his soul (*Atma*) from his body into that of another. (This must have given satisfaction to H.P.B., into whose body the soul of the Master had descended to enable her to write *Isis Unveiled*.)

"But can a yogi's *atma* pass into the body of a woman?" asked the Colonel.

Replied the Great Teacher: "He can clothe his soul in her physical form with as much ease as he can put on a woman's dress. In every physical aspect and relation he would then be like a woman; internally he would remain himself."

Dayananda was then asked to explain how one could distinguish between true and false phenomena.

"Phenomena are of three kinds," he said. "The lowest is produced by sleight of hand—mere conjuring-tricks; the second by mechanical means; the third and highest by the occult powers of man. Whenever anything of a startling nature is exhibited by either of the first two and is falsely represented as supernatural it is a *tamasha*, that is a dishonest deception. But effects produced by the trained human will, without apparatus or mechanical aids, are true yoga."

The Great Teacher laid down these prerequisites for one who wishes to acquire the powers of yoga.

(1) A desire to learn—an intense yearning, in fact.
(2) Perfect control over the passions and desires.
(3) Chastity.
    Pure companionship.
    Pure food, so that only pure influences are brought into the body. (This excludes meat and fish.)
    Pure air.
    Seclusion.
(4) The pupil must be endowed with intelligence.
(5) He must relinquish ignorance, egotism, sensual craving, selfishness and fear of death.

"I have occasionally seen," said the Colonel, extending the subject, "inanimate articles duplicated before my eyes, such as letters, coins, pencils, jewellery. How is this to be accounted for?"

The Swami did not ascribe, as one might think he would, these supernatural occurrences to *tamasha*. "In the atmosphere," said he, "are the particles of every visible thing, in a highly diffused state. The yogi, knowing how to concentrate these particles, does so by the exercise of his will, and forms them into any shape of which he can picture to himself the model."

This is clear enough, but one would like to see it done.

After these discussions, which went on "day by day and evening by evening" in an oppressive, almost unbearable heat, the Colonel had a long and private talk with the Swami about the relationship between their two organizations; and the upshot of it was that they agreed that "neither should be responsible for the views of the other". In other words, the Hindu Dayananda Sarasvati couldn't be associated with the Buddhist activities of the theosophists, but at this stage, it seems, he still permitted a loose connexion between the two organizations. According to a certain Vishwa Prakash, however, the break between the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society occurred irrevocably and with bitterness on the occasion of this meeting at Meerut. Says Vishwa Prakash: "Swami was uptil (*sic*) now fully assured of their intentions but now in plain words they expressed their inability to have faith in God, and in the Vedas. But how could Swami give up his God and the Vedas?" This is, I think, a rather biased summary of the Colonel's views; had he been alive when Vishwa Prakash's book was published, he would have cried out against such a misrepresentation.

After saying good-bye to the Swami, whose body, H.P.B. whispered to the Colonel, was occupied by the spirit of a Mahatma, one of the Brothers, they went on to Simla in the Himalayan foot-hills. Simla was the seat of government in hot weather. As they entered the town, a servant of Mr. Sinnett met them with *jampans*—chairs carried by porters.

The Sinnetts' house was situated on a hill slope and commanded a view of the town. From the verandah could be seen the residences of the high British officials who conducted the government of the Indian Empire. The Founders of the Theosophical Society met most of these high officials, who were only too glad to see a new face. No dinner party to which H.P.B. and the Colonel were invited was complete without an exhibition of table-rapping and fairy-bell ringing. Raps were heard even on the bald heads of members of the Viceroy's Council whom Sinnett had invited to his house to meet the fabulous Madame Blavatsky.

It was while on this visit to the Sinnetts at Simla that there occurred the materialization of the extra cup and saucer which caused so much controversy.

A party of six, three ladies and three gentlemen, were going on a picnic to a valley some distance from the town. H.P.B. and Mrs. Sinnett were two of the ladies, and the gentlemen were Mr. Sinnett, Colonel Olcott, and Major Henderson of the Indian Police. The Sinnetts' butler and other servants had gone on ahead with the hampers and crockery which included half a dozen cups and saucers, one each. Just as they were about to set off, another gentleman, an English judge on a visit to India, joined them and was invited to come too.

After a somewhat long jaunt, they arrived at a ridge covered with grass and overshadowed by trees—a splendid spot for the picnic. The company dismounted and stretched themselves out on the grass; the servants spread the cloth, made a fire, boiled the kettle, laid out the provisions but, as the butler anxiously pointed out, they were one cup and saucer short.

"Two of you good people must drink out of the same cup, it seems," said Mrs. Sinnett, smilingly.

The Colonel lightly suggested that the cup had better be given to one, and the saucer to another.

At this, one of the guests turned to H.P.B. and said, "Now, Madame, here is a chance for you to do a bit of useful magic."

H.P.B. agreed to the suggestion, provided that Major

Henderson lent a hand. He was, of course, more than willing. She told him he would need something to dig with. Thereupon he snatched up a table knife.

H.P.B. did not, as one might expect, become entranced and by the strength of her will concentrate the diffused particles of the atmosphere into the form of a cup and saucer as the Swami had explained; she merely walked about a little, looking intently over the ground, presenting the face of her great seal ring to one spot after another, until finally she said to the Major, "Please dig here."

He plied his knife vigorously. The ground was filled with fine roots from nearby trees: these he cut and pulled out; and he brushed away the soil until, to everyone's surprise, a white porcelain object was unearthed. It was the required cup, and of the identical set as that laid out on the table-cloth.

That is the story. Everyone was impressed, but unfortunately there was an unhappy sequel. On the way home, while the company stopped for a rest, the Major and the English judge were sufficiently lacking in tact to go back to the spot where the cup and saucer had been found; and shortly afterwards they returned, saying that they could not accept the phenomenon as satisfactory because they had seen that by tunnelling inwards from the brow of the hillock, the cup and a saucer might easily have been put there; and they asked Madame Blavatsky to do another phenomenon under conditions which they would dictate. H.P.B. was exceedingly wrathful: the Colonel said that she seemed about to take leave of her senses.

In spite of the insult which had followed the duplication of the cup and saucer, H.P.B. performed another remarkable phenomenon during the evening. She was having dinner with the Humes. Eleven persons were sitting round the table; they included the Sinnetts and the Colonel. The talk was, of course, mainly about occultism. And Madame Blavatsky delighted everyone by holding a letter, enclosed in an envelope, to her forehead, shutting her eyes, and pronouncing that it was from Dr. Thibaut. It was from the learned doctor, but how, everyone asked himself, could she have known? H.P.B. then asked Mrs. Hume if she wanted anything in particular, anything, that is, which could reasonably be materialized. Mrs. Hume replied that she wished she could see again an old family brooch, set round with pearls, which she had lost some years ago.

"Have you an image of it clearly in your mind?" asked H.P.B.

"Yes, perfectly clear."

H.P.B. looked fixedly at Mrs. Hume for a while, then said, "It will not be brought into this house but into the garden. A Brother tells me so."

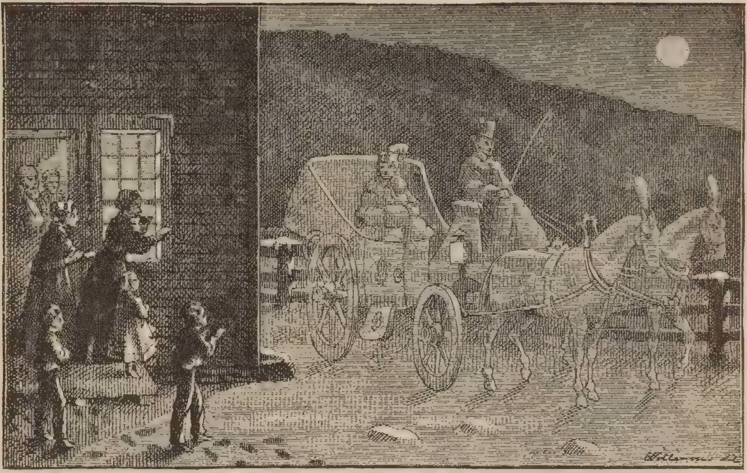
She had grown aware, Sinnett tells us in *The Occult World*, a book which he wrote during the following year, that an invisible Brother was present in the room.

She then asked Mr. Hume if he had in his garden a flower-bed shaped like a star. Mr. Hume had.

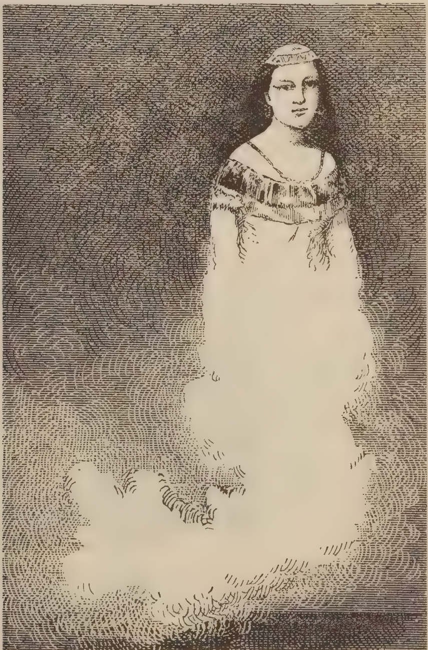
The company arose and trooped out into the garden with lanterns in their hands. They went to the flower-bed shaped like a star, and, after uprooting several flowers, found the missing family brooch wrapped in paper.

Alfred Sinnett was quite convinced of H.P.B.'s occult powers, and he felt that she must have knowledge to equal it. But he could plainly see, on the other hand, how inept she was when it came to managing the Society's affairs. He could do better himself, if only the Brothers would take notice of him; and he told H.P.B. of his wish to get into communication with Them. He felt that They would be more reasonable to deal with than the tyrannical Old Lady whose hysterics created a very bad impression. Englishmen, he said to Colonel Olcott, always associate true merit with calm self-control.

After some deliberation, H.P.B. told him that she thought that this was not impossible, and she advised him to write a letter "to the Unknown Brother". Sinnett did so, and gave the letter to her for transmission, wondering what would happen. He did not keep a copy of the letter, but he remembered that he asked the Brother to produce phenomenally in India a copy of *The Times* on the very day it was published in London. With

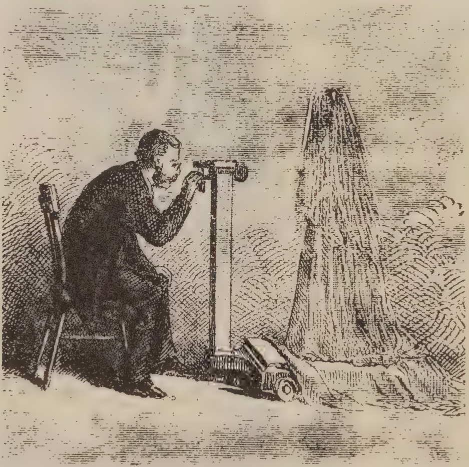


The Spectre Carriage



Light-Heart, Dissolving

A photo of the actual teacup which Madame Blavatsky materialized in India



such a piece of evidence in his hand he would undertake to convert everyone in Simla to theosophy. A day or two elapsed and he heard nothing; then Madame Blavatsky informed him that she had heard (through the psychic telegraph) that he would receive an answer; the delay was due to the fact that the Brothers to whom she had at first applied had declined to receive his communication, but at last she had found one who was willing; he would hear from Him in due course.

Sinnett was sorry that he hadn't written at greater length; so he immediately sent off another letter.

A day or two later he received the reply: there was the letter on his writing-table. He does not say how it came there, but it is to be understood, I think, that it had not come through the post: the Brothers had other and better means of sending letters. "Esteemed Brother and Friend," it began, and was from Koot Hoomi Lal Singh, whom the Swami Dayananda called an imaginary being. Underneath the signature, which is encased in a large egg-shaped flourish, are some Tibetan letters. "Precisely because the test of the London newspaper would close the mouths of the sceptics," He wrote, "it is unthinkable." Then followed a lecture on the foolishness of helping mankind at too quick a pace: the people of the world were not yet prepared for anything like this; they would regard the phenomenon (of *The Times*) as a miracle, and be thrown off their balance. The result would be only deplorable.

H.P.B. also came in for some mild criticism. "...The devoted woman who so foolishly rushes into the wide-open door leading to notoriety." In this way, those many letters which were first published in 1923 under the title of *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* came to be written.

Alfred Percy Sinnett could hardly keep the exciting news to himself. He and his wife, Patience—he had no secrets from her, of course—read the letter through many times. Its tone was decidedly lofty and its advice singularly wise. He told his friend Allan Octavian Hume, latterly a high government official. He had received it, he explained, through Madame

Blavatsky. Then he showed it to him—an actual letter from a *Mahatma*, a Great Soul, one of the Himalayan Brothers, in a Chinese envelope. Hume was deeply interested in the extraordinary document, and after reading it he proposed that he, too, should write to Koot Hoomi Lal Singh. He even proposed, Sinnett tells us in *The Occult World*, without revealing Hume's name, that he should throw everything overboard and become a *chela*, that is a pupil, of this Master in his distant abode in Tibet, and return to the world later "armed with powers which would enable him to demonstrate the realities of spiritual development and the errors of modern materialism".

Hume did write to Koot Hoomi, and in due course he received a reply, one as long as Sinnett had received. Hume wrote again, of course. Who wouldn't? And he again received a reply. His letters, like Sinnett's, had to be given to H.P.B. for transmission; there was no other way in which they could be sent to Koot Hoomi. And Koot Hoomi's replies went to H.P.B., or to Damodar, for transmission. Of course, the Brother could precipitate His letters direct, and He occasionally did so or He made use of the ordinary postal service, but H.P.B. was usually the link both ways. The word "precipitation" in this connexion needs, I find, some explanation. It is not simply what I thought it was. C. Jinarajadasa has enlightened me. In his introduction to *The Early Teachings of the Masters*, 1881-3, he says that letters *precipitated* were not written by hand. In other words, they were materialized by the power of the Adept's thought—the paper, the ink, everything. The thoughts rushed on and took shape *en route* as a letter in a bold Victorian script for the *chela*, Mr. Sinnett or Mr. Hume, C.B., to read, fondle, chew over. How exactly it was done C. Jinarajadasa knew, for he says it "involves the use of fourth-dimensional space", a subject beyond the scope of this book. All the letters are preserved, not in the archives of the Theosophical Society where, I feel, they rightly belong, but in the Manuscript Department of the British Museum, leather-bound in seven volumes, there for everyone to read.

Chapter Seventeen

THE OCCULT WORLD

THE Founders arrived back in Bombay at the end of December, 1880, but they did not make for their cottage amid the palm trees in the native quarter of Girgaum Back Road. Instead they went to Crow's Nest, which Madame Coulomb had found for them meanwhile. It was a more commodious and even stately mansion. A wide flight of stone steps led up to the entrance porch. Because of its reputation of being haunted, a consideration which Madame Coulomb had thought no drawback, it had been acquired cheaply. The Colonel tells us that one night he exorcized the ghost, who was lifting his bed into the air, by pronouncing "a certain Arabic word of power, that H.P.B. had taught him in New York, and the cot was replaced on its legs and the meddlesome spook decamped and never troubled me more". It was the Sinnetts who had persuaded the Founders to leave the native quarter of Bombay. After all, influential Europeans were now joining the Society.

The English newspapers in India were hostile to them. The one exception was *The Pioneer* which, to the concern of the owners of the paper, was carrying on a campaign for theosophy. But in view of the private correspondence which the editor, Mr. A. P. Sinnett, was having with Koot Hoomi, this was not surprising.

It seemed to the Colonel that Buddhism in Ceylon was in rather low water and hardly able to resist the encroachments of Christian missionaries. He felt that something should be done about it, and decided to go there again, this time to raise what he called an Education Fund, by which he meant a fund for the propagation of Buddhism. Although a Buddhist, and by now a kind of Buddhist missionary as well as a theosophist, the Colonel was still a European, that is to say a member of the restless and energetic white race, eager to get everything organized, even in pursuit of strange gods.

He would need, of course, the full co-operation of the High Priests. He began to prepare for the trip. H.P.B. wasn't going with him this time, and she didn't want him to go. She needed him, it seems. When the time for his departure drew near, and he refused to cancel his arrangements, she fell into a white rage —the expression is the Colonel's—shut herself up in her room, and for a whole week refused to see him. It was during this week that the Sinnetts arrived in Bombay *en route* for England.

A bulky letter was precipitated on to the Colonel. It was from the Mahatma Koot Hoomi. But only the attached note was for the Colonel; the letter was for A. P. Sinnett.

> Dear O.:
>
> Forward this immediately to A. P. Sinnett and do not breathe a word of it to H.P.B. Let her alone and do not go near her for a few days. The storm will subside.
>
> Koot Hoomi Lal Singh

Koot Hoomi's letter to Sinnett contained an outline for a book on occultism which, the Mahatma said, he should write. He could make full use of the letters He had written to him. A suggestion from a Brother was a command; and during the month's sea voyage to England, Sinnett wrote *The Occult World*, the story of Madame Blavatsky's Simla phenomena and of the Brotherhood of Adepts. It was published in England during 1881 and created quite a stir in spite of several unfavourable reviews. The notice in the influential *Saturday Review*, for example, called Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott a couple of unscrupulous adventurers and said it would be interesting to know "whether Colonel Olcott's title was earned in the War of Secession or at the bar of a drinking saloon". It was the first clear account of theosophy and modern occultism, a book which the public had been waiting for. It was soon reprinted several times.

On 23 April, 1881, the Colonel set off for Ceylon. It was not a happy departure: in his ears rang his "chum's" angry threat that the Brothers would have nothing more to do with him or the Society; but in spite of this, he arrived safely at Galle four days later, and began at once, with characteristic energy and a clear grasp of the problem as a whole, his work of starting a religious revival. First, he interviewed the leaders of the several Buddhist sects and got them to promise support; then he took to the lecturing field, wrote tracts, replied vigorously to the attacks of the Christian missionaries. He soon discovered that the Singhalese were shockingly ignorant of their religion. He immediately sat down and read all the books on Buddhism in English and French that he could find, ploughed his way through ten thousand pages, and then set to work to compile a *Buddhist Catechism* along the lines of the Christian catechisms he knew. It was promptly translated into Singhalese, given the *nihil obstat* by the High Priest Sumangala, and published. What is perhaps surprising about Colonel Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism* is that it became a best-seller, and was translated into a score of languages; it is still in wide circulation.

He roved about the island, speaking to vast crowds and collecting what money he could for the cause of Buddhist education; and he did not return to Bombay until 19 December. H.P.B. joyously welcomed him home, and then he received a rude shock which he attempts to convey to the reader by the use of italics. *H.P.B. gave him a most kind message from the Brothers about his success in Ceylon.* But had she forgotten, he asked himself in amazement, her warning that the Society would be abandoned by the Brothers if he went to Ceylon? He shook his head and decided, sadly, that he could no longer believe in his "chum's" infallibility.

H.P.B. hadn't remained in Bombay, waiting for the errant Colonel to return. She retreated for the hot summer months to Simla, this time as the guest of the Humes. A. P. Sinnett was also there, having come back from England with copies of *The*

Occult World under his arm. Patience wasn't with him; she had remained behind in England on account of her health.

In 1881 it could be said that the theosophical movement was at last getting under way. But what is theosophy? I think that Messrs. Hume and Sinnett regarded it as a movement for the revealment of knowledge of great benefit to mankind, at least this is the point of view expressed in *The Occult World*. Previously this knowledge had been in the exclusive possession of the White Lodge or Secret Brotherhood of Adepts whose principal seat was—or rather is—the mountain fastness of Tibet.

Of course, these two Englishmen talked about the Mahatmas: it was Sinnett's deepest wish to be brought face to face with one. Hume revealed to Sinnett his profound discontent with the situation. There was a fly in the ointment, and that fly, or rather bluebottle, was Madame Blavatsky. They were progressing favourably along the Path (of ancient wisdom), but it was absurd that their only contact with the Masters was through this uncouth Russian woman, whose bad language and coarse behaviour gave so much offence. For example, when she was once asked, by someone she didn't like, to pass the butter, she snatched up the dish and sent it hurtling towards him with, "Here you are! Grease your soul to hell with it!"

Apart from Koot Hoomi, Sinnett and Hume had received communications from Morya, who was Madame Blavatsky's personal guru. The Old Lady had told them that she had first made His acquaintance in London in 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition. The actual place was Hyde Park, beside the Serpentine, in the moonlight.

After much thought and inward struggle, they decided to try to get in touch with the Brothers direct and thus, in their future dealings with the White Lodge, by-pass the Old Lady. They had heard recently of a kind of super-master called the Maha Chohan, or Great Chohan, who towered above everyone else, and Mr. Hume, having the logical and tidy mind of a Civil Servant, decided to put their case to Him direct. They sat down and together wrote a letter to this Supreme and Holy Mahatma of the White Lodge beyond the Himalayas, declaring that, if they were to do any good in spreading the word of theosophy, they must be enabled to work independently of Madame Blavatsky.

They sealed the letter, and then A. P. Sinnett, conscious of the absurdity of the situation, went in search of this same Madame Blavatsky for her to drop it into the astral post-box. He found her at the piano in the ballroom. He gave her the letter; it had *The Great Chohan* clearly written on the envelope. She put it in her pocket and went on playing. Sinnett returned to the room in which he did his work. Suddenly the door was flung open and in burst Madame Blavatsky.

"What have I been doing?" she screamed, her face white with rage.

Sinnett tried to calm her, told her he couldn't discuss the matter without Mr. Hume being present, and ran off to fetch him. He came back with him, "and a terrible scene ensued", of which A. P. Sinnett, from whose *Early Days in Theosophy in Europe* I have taken this story, gives no details, only that Mr. Hume, late Secretary to the Government of India, was scrupulously polite but freezingly cold.

* * *

The Colonel didn't stay long at Crow's Nest; he seems to have been filled with restlessness, or were his continual travels about India a duty which he undertook solely to spread the word? On 17 February, 1882, he set out on a tour of northern India, speaking as usual in packed halls and collecting recruits; he passed through Delhi and Cawnpore and ended up in Calcutta. H.P.B. joined him there. From Calcutta, the Founders went by sea to Madras where, just outside the city, on the banks of the Adyar River, they found a house for sale in the grounds of Huddleston Gardens. The price was only £600, which was exceedingly cheap even for those times, for there were twenty-one acres of land with it. They had long been looking for permanent headquarters for the Society, and the first glance at this palatial building, with its various outhouses, told them that this was it. Adyar is still the Society's headquarters.

Chapter Eighteen

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

THE Colonel returned to Ceylon in July to continue his educational propaganda. To raise money for the Fund, he talked about the system of voluntary self-taxation adopted by good Christians: they would set aside ten per cent of their income for religious and charitable work. The Colonel told his audience that this was what his own father, and other pious American gentlemen, had done. He then read out a memorandum which proved that they—"the Colombo martyrs" he sarcastically calls them—had given less than one per cent of their incomes for the cause of the Buddhist revival. Before the meeting was concluded he invited everyone to step forward and subscribe.

It was while he was collecting subscriptions in Galle on 29 August, 1882, that there occurred an event which led the Colonel along a new path. A man by the name of Cornelis Appu subscribed half a rupee; he apologized for the smallness of the sum, and explained that he was entirely paralysed in one arm and partially paralysed in one leg, and for this reason had been unable to earn his living for the last eight years. Now, upon his arrival at Colombo, the Colonel had been told by the High Priest Sumangala that the Catholics on the island had made arrangements to convert a place near Kelanie into a healing-shrine, after the fashion of Lourdes. One man was said already to have been miraculously cured, "but on investigation it proved a humbug".

The Colonel had told the High Priest that this was a serious matter. If hypnotic suggestion got going, there would soon be real cures "and there might be a rush of ignorant Buddhists into Catholicism".

"What can I do?" said the High Priest Sumangala.

"Well," said the Colonel, "you must set to work, you or some other well-known monk, and cure people in the name of the Lord Buddha."

"But we can't do it; we know nothing about these things," Sumangala replied.

"Nevertheless, it must be done," said the Colonel.

The Colonel doubtless thought of this conversation with Sumangala when he was confronted by Mr. Cornelis Appu. Upon an impulse, he drew him aside, made a number of passes over his arm, and expressed the hope that he might feel better for it.

That evening, while the Colonel was chatting with his Galle colleagues, the paralytic Mr. Appu hobbled in, excused his interruption, and said that he felt so much better that he had come to say thank you.

"He came in the morning, eager to worship me as something super-human, so much better did he feel. I treated him again, and the next day and the next; reaching the point on the fourth day when he could whirl his bad arm around his head, open and shut his hand, and clutch and handle objects as well as ever. Within the next four days he was able to sign his name, with the cured hand, to a statement of his case, for publication; this being the first time in nine years that he had held a pen. I had also been treating his side and leg, and in a day or two more he could jump with both feet, hop on the paralysed one, kick equally high against the wall with both, and run freely. As a match to loose straw, the news spread throughout the town and district. Cornelis brought a paralysed friend, whom I cured; then others came, by twos and threes first, then by dozens, and within a week or so my house was besieged by sick persons from dawn until late at night, all clamouring for the laying on of my hands. They grew so importunate at last that I was at my wits' end how to dispose of them. Of course, with the rapid growth of confidence in myself, my magnetic power multiplied itself enormously, and what I had needed days to accomplish with a patient, at the commencement, could now be done within a half-hour.

"A most disagreeable feature of the business was the selfish inconsiderateness of the crowd. They would besiege me in my bedroom before I was dressed, dog my every step, give me no time for meals, and keep pressing me, no matter how tired and exhausted I might be. I have worked at them steadily for four or five hours, until I felt I had nothing more in me, then I left them for a half-hour while I bathed in the salt water of the harbour, just at the back of the house, felt currents of fresh vitality entering and re-enforcing my body, gone back and resumed the healing, until, by the middle of the afternoon, I had had enough of it, and then had actually to drive the crowd out of the house. My rooms were on the upper storey—one flight up—and most of the bad cases had to be carried up by friends and laid at my feet. I have had them completely paralysed, with their arms and legs so contracted that the man or woman was more like the gnarled root of a tree than anything else; and it happened sometimes that, after one or two treatments of a half-hour each, I made those people straighten out their limbs and walk about. One side of the broad verandah that ran around the whole house I christened *the cripples' racecourse*, for I used to match two or three of those whose cases had been the worst, and compel them to run against each other the length of the side."

This is the story, so picturesquely told, of the Colonel's faith cures or "psychopathic healing" as he called it. Now the healing of the sick by the laying on of hands, or by the aid of "mesmerized" bottles of oil or water, which were thus turned into medicaments, becomes a regular event in his life and provokes Dayananda Sarasvati to cry: "Newspapers publish reports of Colonel Olcott's innumerable cures; if they are true, why does he not cure sick persons before me and thus convince me of the truth of these reports?" I don't suppose the Colonel was interested in convincing the Swami of anything now. During the previous March, before the Colonel had discovered that he possessed the gift of healing, the Swami's countenance had clouded over, and in thunderous tones he had called the Colonel and H.P.B. ignoramuses who knew nothing of *yoga vidya* [knowledge of yoga], and whose phenomena were performed by the aid of confederates.

On his return to Bombay, the Colonel learnt that H.P.B. was in Darjeeling, in northern Bengal, in sight of the giant mountain Kanchenjunga. From Darjeeling she went quickly and incognito into Sikkim (a country to enter which requires special permission), and there met in the flesh Morya, also Koot Hoomi, who had crossed over from Tibet. This meeting restored her morale. She had been told by her doctors that she had Bright's disease, a serious kidney complaint. In a letter to the Sinnetts she wrote with heroic cheerfulness of her blood turning to water "with ulcers breaking out in the most unexpected and the less explored spots, blood or whatever it may be forming into bags *à la Kangaroo* and other pretty extras and *et ceteras*." She put it all down to Bombay dampness and her fretfulness.

On 19 December the Founders arrived, with their books and furniture, at their new home at Adyar, Madras, on the other side of India.

* * *

The Colonel describes the following year, 1883, as one of the busiest, most interesting and successful. It was certainly a full year for him, but since coming to India his life had been continuously full: he established during the twelve months no fewer than forty-three new branches of the Society in different parts of India and Ceylon, travelled seven thousand miles by train, elephant and "bone-shaking cart", and cured eight thousand sufferers of a variety of illnesses. Of one cure he writes with a gusto which reveals his boundless energy, resourcefulness, self-confidence. The patient was a twenty-eight-year-old Brahmin who had been suffering for two years from paralysis of the face. He was unable, even when asleep, to close his eyelids; he was incapable of moving his tongue, and so on.

"When asked his name, he could make only a horrible sound in his throat, his tongue and lips being beyond his control. It was a large room where I was at work, and I was standing at one end of it when this patient was brought in. He was stopped for examination just within the threshold by my committee. When they stated the case they drew back and left the sick man standing alone and looking at me with an eager expression. He indicated in dumb-show the nature of his affliction. I felt myself full of power that morning; it seemed as if I might almost mesmerize an elephant. Raising my right arm and hand vertically, and fixing my eyes upon the patient, I pronounced in Bengali the words: 'Be healed!', at the same time bringing my arm into the horizontal position and pointing my hand towards him. It was as though he had received an electric shock. A tremor ran through his body, his eyes closed and reopened, his tongue, so long paralysed, was thrust out and withdrawn, and with a wild cry of joy he rushed forward and flung himself at my feet. He embraced my knees, he placed my foot on his head, he poured forth his gratitude in voluble sentences. The scene was so dramatic, the cure so instantaneous, that every person in the room partook of the young Brahmin's emotion, and there was not an eye unmoistened with tears. Not even mine, and that is saying a good deal."

Thus the good Colonel used—or, as he sometimes says, wasted—an enormous amount of his vital force. But the most important event in the Colonel's life during 1883 was the meeting in November at Lahore with Koot Hoomi. It was a fleeting meeting and quite unexpected. In fact, the Colonel was asleep in a tent pitched on an open plain at the time. A hand was laid on him, and he awakened. Thinking that it was a thief, he tightly clutched him by the arms, and in Hindustani demanded to know what he wanted.

"Don't you know me? Don't you remember me?"

It was the sweet voice of the Master.

A feeling of relief and joy swept over the Colonel. His hold relaxed and he joined the palms of his hands in reverential salute. He wanted to jump out of bed and bow down before the divine presence, but Koot Hoomi stayed him.

A few sentences were exchanged—the Colonel does not say what they were—and then Koot Hoomi took hold of the Colonel's hand. In the light of a lamp which burned on a packing-case, the Colonel gazed at the face of the Master, a face which he described as divinely benignant.

Koot Hoomi hadn't put his hand into the Colonel's for pure affection. Presently the Colonel felt something materializing there—a letter, but what was written in it he does not say.

The Master then turned his attention to the Colonel's companion, William Tournay Brown, a young Scot who was asleep on the other side of the tent, which was divided by a canvas screen. Mr. Brown, a new recruit to theosophy, who had been in India only for about a month, was exceedingly favoured to meet the Master. He has given his own account of it in his autobiography, called *My Life*, a sixty-four-page pamphlet in a grey-blue paper cover, which was printed in Germany in 1886. On the title-page of this scarce work is this explanatory note: "The following pamphlet has been prepared for the writer's acquaintances, especially in Scotland." At the time of writing the author had reached only his twenty-eighth year, and as he published no more autobiographies (or anything else), I do not know what happened to him afterwards. His photograph, however, is reproduced in *The Golden Book of the Theosophical Society*, so we do at least know what he looked like: a handsome but sombre young man with a black beard and a worried look in his eyes. As he did not remain devoted to theosophy, but wandered off into other creeds, beginning with Rosicrucianism, I don't suppose he would have had his photograph in *The Golden Book* had he not been sitting between Major-General Morgan and T. Subba Row. H.P.B. is next in the row and behind her, standing up in white Eastern robes and clutching one of Adyar's many pillars, is the Colonel.

At the age of twenty-one William Brown assumed a middle name—Tournay. At twenty-five he passed his final examinations and obtained at Glasgow University the degree of Bachelor of Law.

At twenty-six he fell mentally ill, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that he became aware at the age of twenty-six of his mental illness. He makes it quite clear that he was ill. The year was 1883 and Madame Coulomb had not yet exposed anybody. ". . . For three months I had been suffering," he writes, "from an indescribable illness which no one could understand. To talk of it was only to bring upon myself abuse. I could receive no sympathy anywhere." Least of all from a certain Dr. M. under whose overwhelming influence he had fallen—he writes of this man and of his influence with despair. Dr. M. offered to give him an introduction to a lunatic asylum and actually went to an asylum, met the doctor in charge and tried his hardest to get unhappy Mr. Brown certified and incarcerated. But with the right instinct William Tournay Brown turned instead to "homoeopathists, magnetic-practitioners and spiritualists". In other words, he went for help to the only people who, in days before Freud, had sympathy for, if not understanding of, his case—and perhaps some understanding too, for without knowing it they were practising a kind of rudimentary psycho-analysis.

Brown puts the matter of his cure, or at least improvement, at the hands of a kindly mesmerist thus: "I now understood the method by which the Great Sympathizer effected his cures while on earth. I learned that 'the Despised and Rejected' was nothing more nor less than a Master of Spiritual Science—a Great Mesmerizer. I could well understand his 'casting out devils', for I myself was obsessed."

From mesmerism to spiritualism and from spiritualism to theosophy; this was the path which W. T. Brown trod. A friend put Sinnett's *Occult World* into his hands and from that moment he became a theosophist and presented himself at the door of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society.

On 25 August, 1883, Brown set off for India, armed with letters of introduction to Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott. He met Madame Blavatsky but not the Colonel when he arrived at Adyar a month later: the Colonel was on one of his peregrinations, healing and gathering recruits for the Society. (At Hyderabad he cured a man of blindness in one eye within half an hour by breathing on the eyeball "with mesmeric intent".) The Colonel met "poor Brown", as he calls him, at Hyderabad station, and together they went off to Lahore. And at Lahore, on 19 November, 1883, Brown saw in the distance a man who impressed him as being Koot Hoomi: he does not, unfortunately, say why—on account of his height, the benign expression of his face, his likeness to the portrait of K.H. inside the Shrine? He does not say. And on the morning of the 20th, before it was light, he was awakened by the presence of someone in his tent.

A voice spoke to him "and I find a letter and silk handkerchief within my hand. I am conscious that the letter and silk handkerchief are not placed within my hand in the customary manner. They grow 'out of nothing'. I feel a stream of 'magnetism' and lo! it is 'materialized'. I rise to read my letter and examine the handkerchief. My visitor is gone."

He did not actually see Koot Hoomi on this occasion. He could have done had he turned his head, but he didn't turn his head. The handkerchief is undoubtedly K.H.'s because his initials are embroidered on it—K.H.; and the letter is in K.H.'s familiar handwriting, which the enemies of theosophy say is only Madame Blavatsky's handwriting disguised. The message is largely an exhortation to work for the Society and not grow faint-hearted, and to tell people "that you are from personal knowledge as sure of our existence as you are of your own". Not, to my mind, a very inspired message.

Chapter Nineteen

"IT'S ALL GLAMOUR"

IN January, 1884, the Colonel was off to Ceylon again, this time at the urgent request of his Buddhist friends. On Easter Day, 1883, there had been a clash between a procession of Buddhists and "a mob of Roman Catholics and other evilly-disposed rioters". Result: five cattle slaughtered, and the contents of several carts pillaged. The Buddhists' demand that the ringleaders be brought to justice had come to nothing after much legal wrangling and expense. They had other complaints, too; and in despair they telegraphed to the resourceful Colonel.

While the Colonel was in Colombo, the American-born Unitarian preacher Moncure Conway, who had made Madame Blavatsky's acquaintance during her brief stay in London in 1879, passed the gateway inscribed "Headquarters of the Theosophical Society", and proceeded along a leafy drive to the palatial residence. He found Madame Blavatsky holding court from a large decorated chair—by which he meant presumably an upholstered Victorian armchair with a carved frame, very comfortable and spacious—and wearing an airy white beltless dress like those worn by Russian ladies in summer; she was smoking endless cigarettes and talking in a free and easy manner. Among her retinue Conway mentions Dr. Hartmann,* the New York delegate to the eighth annual congress of the Society, and W. T. Brown of Glasgow, "a young man of pleasant manners".

He was taken upstairs and shown the Shrine in the Occult Room. This was something new, and might be described as a more efficient method of getting in touch with the Mahatmas. It was a cabinet of about five feet high by four wide, in which letters were deposited and, as Conway says sarcastically, "swift answers received from the wonderful Mahatmas". He asked if he could place a note in the Shrine. The answer was no; only a few days before the Mahatmas had forbidden any further correspondence.

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*This was the Dr. Hartmann of Colorado who held spiritualist séances in his home, see page 44.

In the Shrine was a statue of the Buddha and a water-colour portrait of Koot Hoomi, phenomenally produced by Madame Blavatsky.

He went downstairs and into other rooms and was impressed by the splendid furniture. He was told that the solemn Hindu neophytes, all of whom were of wealthy families, had paid for it. Among these neophytes was Mohini Mohun Chatterjee, a handsome young Bengali who had joined the Society in 1882. Like Damodar, he wore his hair long.

Madame Blavatsky and Conway found themselves alone for a moment. She asked him to follow her, led him through a hall and along a corridor, then up a stairway to a richly furnished boudoir, which had been made for her out of a storage room on the roof. (Next door was the Occult or Shrine Room which had been specially built.) She asked him to sit down, offered him a cigarette, but he preferred one of his own cigars.

H.P.B. asked him if he had any special request.

Said Moncure Conway, the fifty-two-year-old Unitarian preacher:

"I wish to find out something about the strange performances attributed to you. I hear of your drawing teapots from under your chair, taking brooches out of flowers, and of other miracles. If such things really occur, I desire to know it, and to give a testimony to my people in London in favour of theosophy. What does it all mean?"

"I will tell you because you are a public teacher," said H.P.B. She was smiling serenely, Conway says. "You ought to know the truth." She paused. "It's all glamour. People think they see what they don't see; that's all there is to it."

This boudoir interview was interrupted by the announcement of dinner. Seven or eight persons, all white, sat at a large round table. Conway found the dinner excellent, but one or two of the young men, he observed, did not touch any meat. H.P.B. ate little and smoked most of the time.

Another woman was present. Conway had not been introduced to her, and she did not join in the conversation. "I thought," said Conway, "she watched me closely." Her name was Madame Coulomb.

In August, 1883, H.P.B. went to stay with Major-General H. R. Morgan of the Indian Army, at his home in Ootacumund, or Ooty as it is more conveniently called, the summer headquarters of the Madras Government. At 7,000 feet above sea-level, Ooty is a cooler place than Adyar. *The Golden Book of the Theosophical Society* reproduces a photograph of the General in full dress uniform: he has snow-white hair and beard and looks like Longfellow. He became a devout theosophist. While H.P.B. was still at Ooty, business brought him to Madras. He took the opportunity of calling at the Society's headquarters.

He was shown by Madame Coulomb "a wonderful painting" of Koot Hoomi inside the Shrine, but she opened the door in such a clumsy fashion that a little china tray was knocked off its shelf and smashed to pieces on the floor. While she lamented and wrung her hands—the tray was a valued possession of Madame Blavatsky's—M. Coulomb carefully gathered up the pieces.

The General suggested that they should try to put the fragments together with the help of some clay. While M. Coulomb went off for clay, the fragments, collected together in a cloth, were put inside the Shrine.

Damodar was present, and to him the General remarked that the Brothers, if they considered the matter important enough, would restore the tray to its original state.

Five minutes later Damodar said, "I think there is an answer." The doors of the Shrine were opened and there, to the General's delight, was a note from the Brothers. It read:

> TO THE SMALL AUDIENCE PRESENT
>
> Madame Coulomb has occasion to assure herself that the Devil is neither so black nor so wicked as he is generally represented; the mischief is easily repaired.

They hurriedly opened the cloth into which they had put the broken pieces—the tray was intact! The Brothers had mended it, and mended it so that you couldn't tell it from new.

* * *

After hearing the complaints of the Singhalese Buddhists, the Colonel told them to form themselves into a Buddhist Defence Committee. They did so and, at the suggestion of High Priest Sumangala, it was unanimously resolved that "Colonel H. S. Olcott, of Madras, be respectfully requested to generally assist the Committee" by going to London and laying their grievances before the Colonial Office. The Colonel, whose constant wanderings suggest an obsession, was only too happy to do so. Apart from the business of the Easter Day riot, the ringleaders of which were still unpunished, the Singhalese Buddhists had several other grievances which, it was decided, the Colonel also should lay before the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Derby. They asked that the birthday of the Buddha, Full Moon Day of May, the Buddhist Christmas, be declared a holiday for Buddhists in government employment, that a Buddhist Registrar of Marriages be appointed for the island so that Buddhists need no longer be married by officials of another faith, and other entirely reasonable requests.

H.P.B., who had fallen ill again, decided to go with the Colonel to Europe. A sea voyage, she was told, would do her good. "I'm falling to pieces, crumbling away like an old sea-biscuit," she wrote to one of her London friends. So shortly after the Colonel's return to Madras they both set off, in

February, 1884, for Marseilles, taking with them Mohini Chatterjee, and the domestic, Babula. Headquarters at Adyar were left in charge of Dr. Hartmann, Damodar, M. Coulomb, a wealthy English electrical engineer called St. George Lane-Fox, who had just arrived there from London, and T. Subba Row.

The photograph of the Telugu Brahmin, T. Subba Row, reveals a pleasant-featured man with large smouldering brown eyes, and with rings in the lobes of his ears. There was something both sincere and penetrating in those eyes of his. He was a lawyer by profession, a pleader in the Madras court, and a Sanskrit scholar. His interest in occultism had made him write to the editor of *The Theosophist*. He knew more of the Ancient Wisdom than anyone else in Madame Blavatsky's circle, and for this reason she held him in special esteem.

H.P.B. had locked her boudoir and given the key to M. Coulomb; she had also locked the Occult Room, the Shrine of which had been made by M. Coulomb, and given the key to Damodar. No one was to be allowed in during her absence.

Chapter Twenty

PRIESTESS OF ISIS

THE arrival in France of the famous Madame Blavatsky was announced, of course, in the French papers. The Russian journalist Vsevolod Sergeyevich Solov'yov read about it in *Le Matin*. The news excited him for he wanted to investigate occultism, and he had read in *Russkiy Vestnik* H.P.B.'s remarkable stories of India, and of India's wonder-working sages called Mahatmas. He was looking for a new subject to write about, and had been thinking even of going to India to seek her out.

V. S. Solov'yov was the brother of the well-known philosopher and mystical writer Vladimir Solov'yov, who saw the face of Sophia* hovering under the vast dome of the British Museum reading-room, and heard a voice telling him to go to Egypt. . . .

V. S. Solov'yov wrote immediately to St. Petersburg, to a friend of his who was in communication with Madame Blavatsky, asking him to let her know that he would very much like to meet her.

After arriving in Marseilles, H.P.B. and the Colonel proceeded to Nice, where they stayed in the Palais Tiranty which belonged to Marie, Lady Caithness, Duchesse de Pomar. Like Solov'yov, Lady Caithness was very interested in occult matters. She had embraced theosophy and had been given a charter by H.P.B. to establish a lodge in France. Lady Caithness was rich, lived in splendour—she had a magnificent *hôtel* in Paris—and was generous and devoted to H.P.B., who was therefore able to regard with good-humoured toleration her calling herself *Présidente de la Société Théosophique d'Orient et d'Occident*. The dominant influence in the life of Lady Caithness was the belief that she had been, in a former existence, the unhappy and unfortunate Mary, Queen of Scots. She was the author of several wearisome books of a religio-symbolical nature which were published at her own expense: one of them —*The Mystery of the Ages*—has her photograph as the frontispiece—the sad, not to say mad, face of a little woman of vast wealth.

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*Sophia, the Holy Wisdom, has received the dedication of many churches in the Orthodox Communions. Her status may seem obscure from the angle of theology, since she is not the same as any member of the Trinity. As an aspect of God, she stands nearest to the Holy Ghost, but subjectively she is the Higher Self or immortal consciousness which on rare occasions tells the mortal personality what to do.

Solov'yov soon heard from his friend in St. Petersburg: Madame Blavatsky would receive him at any time he liked. She was now in Paris, Lady Caithness having supplied her with an apartment in Rue Notre Dame des Champs, on the left bank. Solov'yov described the street as long and mean, and when the coachman stopped, was rather surprised to find no long line of carriages in front of number 46—carriages belonging to distinguished persons who had flocked to see the redoubtable foundress of theosophy. He thought that she must have left Paris.

The concierge showed him the way. He climbed the very dark staircase and rang the bell. Babula, whom he described as a slovenly figure in a turban, answered the door and admitted him into a tiny, dim lobby. He asked for Madame Blavatsky and presented his card. He was invited into a poorly-furnished room with a low ceiling. Suddenly the door opened and there she was.

Solov'yov described H.P.B. as a tall woman who, on account of her unusual stoutness, produced the impression of being shorter. At first, her face with its brown skin and plain features, surmounted by a mop of slightly frizzy hair, struck him as repulsive, but the gaze from her great rolling blue eyes—wonderful eyes he called them—with their hidden power, made him forget everything else. She was oddly dressed in a sort of black sacque or loose gown, and on her slender fingers were many large jewelled rings.

She received him so affectionately and kindly that his disappointment at the drabness of her surroundings quickly evaporated. He was soon talking to her, and in Russian, as if she were an old friend.

He told her his reason for coming to see her. It was not idle curiosity. For some years now he had been reading occultist literature, and there were many serious questions he wanted to ask her.

She laughed good-humouredly. If he were really serious, she would do all she could to help him.

"You'll have to begin at the beginning with me, Helena Petrovna," said Solov'yov. "I know of you, your works and your Society only what you yourself have printed in *Russkiy Vestnik.*"

"Well, little father," she interrupted, "since that time much water has flowed away; then our Society was still only hatching out of its egg, but now. . . ."

He asked her if she were staying in Paris for long, and she replied that that depended upon her Master, her Guru.

"What Master?" asked Solov'yov with a puzzled look.

"My Master, Teacher, Guru—well, call Him if you like Goolab Lal Singh," she said. This was the name she had given to her Mahatma in *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* which Solov'yov had read in *Russkiy Vestnik.*

Solov'yov felt as if a bowl of cold water had been thrown at his head. He thought it possible that such a Master might exist, but the simplicity with which she had spoken to him made him feel that a lie, an intangible lie, had come between them.

He restated calmly his position. He had come to see her in order to ask her a number of serious questions of a spiritual nature: they had been raised through reading her stories in *Russkiy Vestnik.* If she was either unable or unwilling to answer these questions, then he didn't want to hear any more talk of masters and their marvels, or of her Theosophical Society. Let them be just good friends.

She did not reply immediately, but gazed at him with her bright, magnetic eyes; then she said that she could, and would, answer his questions.

"Excuse me," she said, getting up. "I will return in a moment, only I must order Babula, my servant, an Indian who just now opened the door to you, to think about my dinner, otherwise I will remain hungry."

She left the room and returned a few minutes later.

"Now, my good fellow-countryman, my dear Mr. Vsevolod Sergeyevich," she said. "No doubt you do not believe me, but once that I have said that I can answer your questions, that means that I can and am willing to do so." She added that she had known of him for some time, and had been informed that he was being drawn to her. "Listen!" she said, making an upward flourish with her arm.

Suddenly Solov'yov quite distinctly heard above his head, by the ceiling, a very melodic sound; he likened it to the notes of a little silver bell and to the mysterious strains of an Aeolian harp.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"It means," replied H.P.B., "that my Master is here, although we don't see Him. He tells me that I can trust you, and that I should do for you all that I can because you are under His protection from now and for ever." She gave him a frank glance. "So there, sir!"

Solov'yov liked her more than ever. She was fun! But he was unconvinced about the Master, and wondered if there was any connexion between her leaving the room and the sound of the astral bell.

She called Mohini, and explained that he was a *chela*, or pupil, of the Master Koot Hoomi. He entered the room, and prostrated himself before her. Solov'yov, a Russian, must have witnessed many bowings and scrapings of peasants before their masters, but he was somewhat amazed at the manner in which this rich Brahmin almost crawled on the ground before Madame Blavatsky. He described Mohini as strikingly handsome. When he got up, Solov'yov offered him his hand, but this produced an unexpected effect. Mohini shrank away. "Excuse me, sir, I may not!" he said in English.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Solov'yov in Russian.

"You can't do anything with that," explained H.P.B. "He's a *chela*, that's the same as a monk or an ascetic. He must keep off earthly influences. Do you know, he never even looks at a woman."

Two days later, Solov'yov was again at 46 Rue Notre Dame des Champs. He found H.P.B. playing patience and smoking and still wearing the same black sacque or sack, which was somewhat more voluminous than the modern, 1958, sack. Her hands, with their soft fingers and long fingernails, were sparkling with diamonds, rubies and emeralds.

After reading the rules of the Theosophical Society, and not finding anything objectionable in them, he agreed to become a member. He was initiated by a simple ceremony which was performed with the assistance of Mohini and a certain Bertram Keightley, a wealthy young man who had just taken his finals at Oxford. He paid his subscription of one pound sterling, and was given the password. Before leaving that day, he decided, after another glance at Babula, that this turbaned Indian had an impertinent, villainous face.

Solov'yov soon met the President of the French branch of the Society, the eccentric Lady Caithness. He had already heard of her strange delusion of believing that she was Mary, Queen of Scots. Here is his description of the meeting:

> I had already time to perceive her: she was a richly-dressed, stout old lady with a face which had probably been beautiful in her youth, but now it was without any expression and thickly covered with rouge and white pigment. Huge diamond ear-rings glittered in her ears from beneath the ribbons of her hat, and on her bosom was a massive and resplendent brooch, also of large valuable stones.

> "Ah, dear duchess," exclaimed Blavatsky, entering and greeting her guest.
>
> "Marie Stuart!" I almost said.
>
> Blavatsky at once introduced me, listing all my attributes which were able to give me a certain importance in the eyes of such a lady.
>
> The duchess stretched out to me a large thick hand, and at once with her first word invited me to a ball which she was giving in a few days. Not without astonishment I thanked her, and having uttered several phrases suitable to the occasion, hastened to conceal myself in the next room where Mohini and Keightley were.

The Theosophical Society, like other societies, has its renegades and apostates as well as its saints. Solov'yov was an apostate of the Theosophical Church. He was sufficiently convinced of the principles of theosophy to become a member, but after Madame Blavatsky's death he published a book about her, *Sovremennaya Zhritsa Izidy* [*A Contemporary Priestess of Isis*], in which he explains that her life was based on fraud. This naturally caused much distress in theosophical circles and brought forth the Colonel's indignation.

One cannot absolve Solov'yov from prejudice, but there are two things in his favour. In the first place, he writes well. *Sovremennaya Zhritsa Izidy* is from the pen of a professional writer who has an eye for details that matter; and most theosophical literature which has received the imprimatur makes wearisome reading. In the second place, the ordinary reader finds it easier to believe that the precipitation of letters, duplication of jewellery, and so on, were sleight of hand or the work of confederates rather than what was claimed for them—evidence of the Mahatmas and their miraculous powers.

Solov'yov met other members of the Society, among whom were Madame Fadeyev and Madame Zhelikhovsky, H.P.B.'s aunt and sister: they had come from Russia to meet Helena Petrovna, not having seen her for eleven long years. And he made, of course, the acquaintance of Colonel Olcott, who had been on the other side of the Channel settling disputes between members of the London Lodge, and pleading at the Colonial Office the cause of the Singhalese Buddhists.

He describes the Colonel as a man fully fifty years of age, of medium height, thickly built and broad, but not stout. There was a large bald patch in the usual place on his head, but his face, framed in a magnificent silver beard, was handsome and pleasant. Moreover, his energy and the liveliness of his movements showed that he was far from being an old man, a description which Solov'yov caps by asserting that the Colonel possessed great strength and sound health. He wore glasses which, to some extent, concealed the sole defect in his appearance, a defect which Solov'yov, quoting a Russian phrase, calls a spoonful of tar in a barrel of honey. "One of his eyes was extremely disobedient and would turn in all directions, sometimes with a startling and very unpleasant speed. As long as the disobedient eye remained still, you had before you a handsome, pleasant and kindly, but not especially clever man, whose appearance aroused your sympathy and inspired your confidence. Then suddenly something twitched, the eye tore itself from its place and darted off suspiciously and knavishly, and confidence immediately vanished."

On 11 June, 1884, Solov'yov witnessed, and later testified to in a signed statement, a remarkable phenomenon performed by H.P.B., a phenomenon which Alvin Boyd Kuhn, who wrote a sober and learned account of theosophy, calls "a most baffling account of Madame's gifts". It was this. A group of theosophists was sitting with Madame Blavatsky at 46 Rue Notre Dame des Champs when a servant was observed through the open door of the drawing-room to go to the front door and take a letter from the postman. In sight of everybody, the letter was immediately brought to Madame Zhelikhovsky. A glance at the stamp and the Odessa postmark told her, and her sister, H.P.B., that it was from a member of their family.

H.P.B. was challenged to divine the contents of the letter. She held it to her forehead and wrote down on a sheet of paper what (she said she saw) was in the letter. Her sister laughingly said that she had been informed beforehand. To this, H.P.B. replied that she would underscore in red pencil her name in the unopened letter and add interlaced triangles (Solomon's Seal) below the signature of the writer of the letter. To effect this, she underlined in red crayon her name on the copy she had made, and then drew the interlaced triangles on the same piece of paper. Next, she put the two letters, one of which was in its unopened envelope, side by side, and placed a hand on each, to make, as she said, a bridge between them. In this attitude she remained for a few moments, with an expression of intense mental concentration. "*Tiens, c'est fait.*" The experiment is finished. Upon the letter being opened, it was found that she had divined its contents exactly, and, what was more, she had managed by occult means to draw the Seal of Solomon under the writer's signature and also a red line under her own name in the body of the letter.

Solov'yov tries to make as little as possible of H.P.B. All Paris—*tout Paris*—he says, was *not* talking of her, and there was no stream of important callers at her door. She had "arrived" perhaps, but only in a rather disappointed sort of way. In all, Solov'yov counted thirty-one persons during his frequent visits to Rue Notre Dame des Champs, most of them women. The Theosophical Society, he says, was a small circle of ladies, nothing more!

I am sure that it seemed like this to Vsevolod Solov'yov, but among H.P.B.'s supporters was Lady Caithness, who was surrounded by the cream of society as well as the top mystics of Paris; and into this society H.P.B. made her way, leading the Colonel by the hand. In the salon of the Paris *hôtel* of Lady Caithness she and the Colonel were made to sit in two thronelike armchairs, while the nobility of the Faubourg St. Germain were led up and introduced to them.

The Countess d'Adhémar invited her and her retinue to the Château d'Enghien, with its splendid lake and woods, just outside Paris. The Colonel's little bearded clerk, William Quan Judge, who had been carried by the tide to Europe, was also there. In the Château d'Enghien H.P.B. began work on her masterpiece, *The Secret Doctrine*, and performed nightly acts of phenomena, among which was the diffusion of mystic scent. "It floated round and round the table," writes Judge. "Of course, many sceptics will see nothing in it, but I and others well know that it was a phenomenon, and that the perfume had been sent for many miles through the air." There was an unexpected sequel. The following week Judge returned to the Château d'Enghien to give back a book he had borrowed, and the Countess d'Adhémar told him that, after they had all departed, the peculiar scent had floated back into the house all on its own. It was so strong that she had had to order the windows to be opened. Judge told H.P.B. of the incident.

"It sometimes happens," she commented.

* * *

"It's high time I went to London," H.P.B. said to Solov'yov, after she had been in Paris for three months. "Sinnett is wild with impatience to see me, everything has been properly arranged, and the psychists have long been wishing to see me face-to-face."

The "psychists" were the members of the Society for Psychical Research, a body founded in 1882 by the philosopher and classical scholar Henry Sidgwick, his pupil and close friend, the poet and essayist Frederic Myers, and Edmund Gurney who is described in *The Dictionary of National Biography* as a philosophical writer. All were Cambridge men, and the Society arose directly out of the Cambridge University Ghost Society, founded in the 1850s for the purpose of investigating the supernatural. The aim of the Society for Psychical Research was to sift genuine ghosts and previsions from the chaff of coincidence and hallucination. Gurney, Myers and Frank Podmore (another early member of the Society) produced in 1886 a monumental work on apparitions called *Phantasms of the Living*, an entirely sober collection of incidents. Myers was also a member of the Theosophical Society and a close friend of Sinnett.

H.P.B. seems to have had a somewhat inaccurate notion of the Society for Psychical Research, and to have regarded it as a convenient platform for making theosophical propaganda.

She was mistaken when she said that Sinnett was wild with impatience to see her. He was dreading to see her. He had been living in London since the previous year, having been sacked from *The Pioneer*, the owners of which did not want a theosophist as an editor; and when he had heard that the Founders were coming to Europe, he was filled with dismay. H.P.B. had told him quite plainly, when he last saw her at Adyar, that her work lay in India and that she intended to stay there till the end of her days. Europeans, she had declared, would never understand theosophy. Sinnett shuddered at the thought of the Old Lady in London society. It was, he thought, supremely desirable in the interests of theosophy that she should stay away. As for the Colonel, whom he liked—his personality would only set Englishmen's teeth on edge.

Sinnett was not exactly feeling depressed at the loss of the editorship of *The Pioneer*, an important and well-paid job. Theosophy had opened a new career for him, and had also given him a subject on which to write books. *The Occult World* had been a great success, and he had followed it up with two theosophical novels and *Esoteric Buddhism*, which sets forth the principles underlying phenomena—the subject of the first book. Sinnett was, of course, one of the leading lights of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society, but he had arrived in England too late—in April, 1883—to be its President, for three months before—in January—Dr. Anna Kingsford had been elected to that office. Sinnett confesses his disappointment at this. After all, next to the Founders, he had done more than anyone else to build up theosophy, and he had a link with Koot Hoomi, one of the Masters! On the other hand, Anna Kingsford, like Madame Blavatsky herself, was a woman whom he could respect. She was the author of a remarkable work of occult truth, *The Perfect Way* (which still has a steady sale), and the sort of person, because of her mystical outlook, whom the Theosophical Society wished to attract. Moreover, she was a good public speaker, and a doctor of medicine. Her love for animals and all living creatures, and her wish to refute the claims of vivisectionists, had made her study medicine—in Paris, because the prejudices of Victorian England barred women from medical schools. She believed in the reincarnation theory, and through her dreams and visions had decided that in former lives she had been Mary Magdalene, Joan of Arc, Anne Boleyn and other interesting persons. She was, of course, a vegetarian, and, to crown all, a remarkably beautiful and still youthful woman. Lady Caithness counted her among her special friends.

In June, 1883, the members of the London Lodge passed a resolution stating that they devoted themselves "chiefly to the study of occult philosophy as taught by the Adepts of India with whom Mr. Sinnett has been in communication". But after reading *Esoteric Buddhism*, Anna Kingsford decided that there was insufficient evidence for the existence of these Eastern Masters, and of the ability of those who claimed contact with them to recognize them. In this view she was supported by her collaborator and companion, Edward Maitland, who was the Vice-President of the London Lodge. Being entirely honest and frank, they did not keep this opinion to themselves, but announced it at a meeting of the London Lodge in October, 1883. Sinnett was staggered: this not only removed the ground from under the feet of theosophy as such, but aimed a mortal blow at him personally. Anna Kingsford went on to say that she did not doubt man's ability to transcend himself: *The Perfect Way* envisaged the possibility of man's attaining powers even greater than those said to be possessed by these Eastern Masters, but only those who were Masters themselves could recognize these Masters, as only those who possess the Christ-Spirit can recognize Christ. Anna Kingsford, wife of an Anglican clergyman, was a Christian mystic and somewhat lacking in sympathy for Tibetan and Indian mysticism.

As was written in the minutes: "Mr. Sinnett protested against the language of the address, expressed regret and indignation at the terms in which she [Anna Kingsford] referred to the Brothers. He saw that it would be necessary for him to bring a resolution on the subject before the Society. . . ."

This was the split in the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society which brought the Colonel, with Mohini, hurriedly across the Channel during the following spring. It even took precedence over his business at the Colonial Office. He arrived at the beginning of April; and on the 7th an important meeting of the London Lodge was held—at which the members voted for a new President and Vice-President—at the chambers in Lincoln's Inn of Mr. Gerard Brown Finch, barrister, once senior wrangler at Cambridge. All the members, with the exception of Maitland, had been affronted by Anna Kingsford's views on the Brothers. As Sinnett said ironically, she felt herself to be the real leader of the spiritual revelation which was beginning to flow into the world. Many of the members wanted Sinnett to be the President, but in view of the part he had taken in the controversy, he felt he should hold back from this office and he put forward instead Mr. Finch. The meeting was at its height when the door opened and in came, quite unexpectedly, Madame Blavatsky.

Sinnett was speaking. He broke off and went to greet her. A little crowd had collected round her and he was surprised to see that one of the ladies present "actually sank on her knees before the illustrious visitor". She was conducted to the end of the room, and introduced to the members.

She had not come for the fun of it, but to mend the rift which the Colonel had failed to mend: the best he had been able to do was to propose that Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland form themselves into an independent body, but one still affiliated to the Theosophical Society, to be called the Hermetic Theosophical Society, for those who would rather take their stand on Greek and Christian occultism. Madame Blavatsky, at the height of her power and success and feeling herself to be irresistible, bade Anna Kingsford and Maitland to present themselves to her. They did so, and then she peremptorily ordered them to shake hands with Mr. Sinnett and let bygones be bygones for the sake of theosophy. She fixed her great eyes on them, "as if", wrote Maitland, "to compel us by their magnetism to obey her behest". But Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland had grown accustomed in their struggles against vivisection, which took them on lecture tours over the Continent, to resist the authority of others and even to impose their own authority. It was a great moment in the history of occultism, this meeting between Madame Blavatsky and Dr. Anna Kingsford.

Maitland spoke up for Anna and for himself. "Repentance," he said quietly but firmly, "ought to precede forgiveness." And he invited Mr. Sinnett to do his part.

At this unexpected opposition, Madame Blavatsky's eyes flashed more powerfully, especially on Anna. "Of course neither of us," wrote Maitland, "was in the smallest degree affected by her sorcery." And then Colonel Olcott, seeing that a fiasco would occur unless something was done to avert it, approached H.P.B. and said that he couldn't have her trying to magnetize Dr. Kingsford. They all relaxed at this, and the rest of the evening was spent in pleasant conversation.

Two days later, Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland were given a charter by the Colonel to start the Hermetic Lodge of the Theosophical Society, a heterodox branch and entirely incompatible with theosophy, if by theosophy one means the wisdom religion of the Tibetan Brothers. Among those present on this historic occasion was Lady Wilde and her two sons, Oscar and William.

H.P.B. stayed for a week in London and then returned to Paris.

Her second visit to London, at the end of June, was for a longer period, and for the express purpose of being interviewed by a Committee of the Society for Psychical Research. She went to stay at Notting Hill Gate with Mrs. Arundale and her daughter Francesca, who had received a number of instructive letters from Koot Hoomi.

The Colonel, Mohini, and Sinnett already had been examined on four separate days during May and June. The Committee consisted of Gurney, Myers, Podmore and Stack, and, later, Hodgson.

The Colonel told them of Damodar's astral flights in the service of the Masters.

> *Colonel:* Here is a photograph [photograph produced] of Mr. Damodar taken while he was absent from the outer body and travelling in his inner self, or as you call it, the "phantasm". I have also here two sets of documents which seem to prove the possibility of a living man voluntarily travelling in the double, or phantasm, to a great distance and then exercising his intelligence.

The Colonel's homely and straightforward replies did not set the teeth of Frederic Myers and J. Herbert Stack on edge, as Sinnett had feared; but when Sinnett revealed, in *The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe*, that he had had this fear, he could well remember some examples of the Colonel's teeth-setting-on-edge behaviour. To the distress of a certain Alice Leighton Cleather,* the Colonel in this little posthumous book of Sinnett's is stripped bare and held, wriggling, under the magnifying-glass.

June the 30th was "the day of disaster", Sinnett tells us, "and Colonel Olcott its unfortunate author". H.P.B. had just arrived from Paris, full of confidence in her capacities to magnetize the "psychists". The occasion was not one at which either the Colonel or H.P.B. was interviewed by the Committee formed to Investigate the Evidence for Marvellous Phenomena: the theosophists, it seems, were there merely as distinguished guests. However, in the course of the proceedings, Colonel Olcott, uninvited, got up and made a speech—he always, as a matter of course, made speeches at meetings—and at some point in his speech, which Sinnett described as in his worst style, he produced from his pocket a small tin figure of

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**H. P. Blavatsky as I Knew Her*, by A. L. Cleather, 1923.

the Buddha mounted on little wheels. Sinnett called it a toy, and, when used to illustrate a point of theosophy, in the worst possible taste, setting everyone's teeth on edge. These matters are of course subtle: the Colonel, with or without his "Buddha on wheels", may well have set the teeth of the members of the Society for Psychical Research, and the teeth of everyone else who was forced to listen to him, on edge, but from Sinnett's account it does not follow as a matter of course. The whole incident, as told by him, seems very inoffensive, and the Buddha on wheels even charming.

However, something went wrong with the Colonel's speech. Sinnett puts it more strongly: Madame Blavatsky, he says, sensed that something dreadful had happened—the brash, naïve Colonel had put his foot in it again, committed with his little Buddha on wheels some terrible *faux pas* which threw discredit on the Theosophical Society—so Sinnett tells us. He must have done something awful for "to say that Madame Blavatsky was furious is to give a mere faint suggestion of her condition". After the meeting, H.P.B. insisted upon dragging the Colonel to the Sinnetts' house, where neither of them was staying, and there in the library, her face bleached white, she poured out the inexhaustible vials of her wrath until the poor Colonel ran round in circles. Mr. and Mrs. Sinnett were witnesses of the amazing scene. "She denounced her unhappy colleague in language so violent that I was really afraid it would penetrate the next house, and had to use strong language myself in an attempt to make her slacken off in her fury."*

The Colonel did not know what he had done wrong, and could only make what Sinnett calls futile remarks—"What do you want me to do?" he asked. "Do you want me to commit suicide?"

**The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe*, 1922.

Chapter Twenty-one

TRAP-DOORS, ETC.

According to the First Report of the Society for Psychical Research, the Committee interviewed Madame Blavatsky on 9 August, but what questions they asked her and what were the nature of her replies, the Report does not say. However, in spite of the Colonel's tin Buddha and his silly speech, they were not unfavourably impressed with theosophy or with the Founders. Then in September, 1884, before they had come to any definite conclusions, or sent their Report to the printer, they received news from India which put the whole matter of their investigations into an entirely new perspective.

In *The Golden Book of the Theosophical Society*, C. Jinarajadasa tells us, in his tactful manner, that difficulties arose between the Coulombs and the Board of Control who had been left in charge of the Society's headquarters at Adyar. Although Jinarajadasa does not say so, the Coulombs were part of the Board of Control and they were controlling as well as they could that part of it, the boudoir, which was left in their special care; but this, if anything, only made it easier for the difficulties to arise. Madame Coulomb seems to have been a difficult woman, and unable to see on which side her bread was buttered. Moreover, she was indiscreet, her tongue always wagging and complaining, and even while the Founders were in residence it had wagged and complained into any ear that was willing. Dr. Hartmann and St. George Lane-Fox, two other members of the Board of Control, had been drawn to Adyar by the magic of Madame Blavatsky, and were sitting complacently at her feet. They did not want to hear the irascible Madame Coulomb say that H.P.B. owed her money—money which she had borrowed in Egypt in 1872; it was specially odious to St. George Lane-Fox, a rich man. It poisoned the atmosphere of the place. And Madame Coulomb did not stop there: she hinted that the Marvellous Phenomena, which the Society for Psychical Research in London were quietly investigating, were the result of the work of confederates. She should know; and she had letters from Madame Blavatsky, who owed her money, letters which . . . and so on and so forth.

Dr. Hartmann, a man with mystical, entranced eyes and a teapot-like profile, and Mr. St. George Lane-Fox, whose face I can only try to imagine, not having seen his photograph, if ever one was taken, pressed their hands to their ears to shut out the impious words and fled from the presence of Madame Coulomb, who was assuming in their eyes the shape of the Devil. Moreover, she refused, to their stupefaction, to let them into H.P.B.'s boudoir, a room which had a great attraction for them because it was *her* room, that is to say it was bathed in the divine aura: they did not regard Madame Blavatsky as an ordinary woman, but as a woman who possessed powers of a superhuman kind, a view which was fully shared by Sinnett in spite of his aversion to H.P.B. in her human aspect.

They had, of course, to let the Founders know what was happening. And Mr. Lane-Fox wrote to Madame Blavatsky and told her that Madame Coulomb was trying her best to undermine the power of the Society. "She opposes everything that is for the benefit of the Society. More serious is the fact that she says she lent you money in Egypt."

Mr. Lane-Fox was deeply shocked at this last accusation. Madame Coulomb had lent Madame Blavatsky money in Egypt, and Madame Blavatsky had not paid it back; but why Madame Blavatsky, whose hands were loaded with diamonds, rubies and emeralds—sure sign of the prosperity of her affairs—had not paid it back is a mystery, and why Mr. St. George Lane-Fox should have thought this so terrible is a greater mystery still.

This was not the end of the list. Madame Coulomb asserted, said Mr. Lane-Fox, that M. Coulomb (under Madame Blavatsky's orders) had constructed secret trap-doors for the production of phenomena, that the Theosophical Society was founded to overthrow British rule in India. . . . And she could tell more if she wanted to, she said, and so on and so forth. . . .

A letter telling the same tale also arrived from the thin-legged Damodar.

While these letters were making their slow way to France, Lane-Fox and Hartmann decided to expel the Coulombs from the Society's premises: they had discovered, as a last straw, that the Coulombs were taking the household money for their own uses. But Koot Hoomi, unseen but ever present, precipitated a timely letter to Damodar, urging restraint. "Madame Coulomb is a medium and as such irresponsible for many things she may do. At the same time she is kind and charitable. . . . It is my wish that she shall continue in charge of the household business. . . ."

Damodar rushed to Lane-Fox with this letter.

Madame Coulomb said that Damodar wrote the letter himself: she crept upstairs after him, saw him in the agony of composition, and ran before him when he came down—to hear what he had to say. She did not believe in Koot Hoomi or any of the other Mahatmas, said that people had "ruined their brains" in looking for these Mahatmas.

"I address this letter to you both," wrote Madame Blavatsky to the Coulombs, "because I think it well that you should lay your heads together and think seriously about it." She told them all that Mr. Lane-Fox had told her, and then, unable to restrain her feelings, burst out, "Oh, Madame Coulomb! What, then, have I done to you, that you should try to ruin me in this way? Is it because for four years we lived together, helping each other to meet the troubles of life, and because I have left everything in the house in your hands, saying to you continually, 'Take what money you need,' that you seek to ruin me for life in the minds of those who, when they turn their back on me, will turn their back on you first?" It is a long letter, full of statements which contradict the statements of others, pleading, denying, accusing, lamenting—a hysterical letter, in fact, and it concludes with "I sign myself with anguish of heart which you can never comprehend—for ever your friend".

The Colonel also wrote to Madame Coulomb, pointing out that the theosophical movement did not rest on phenomena, and that even if she proved that the phenomena were false, the Society would continue its good work unchecked.

These letters from the Founders arrived when Madame Coulomb, Damodar and Lane-Fox were enjoying a change of air at Ootacamund. In his wife's absence, M. Coulomb opened the letter. To the Colonel, he replied that his blood fairly boiled when he read the lies that had been told about him and his wife, and he was waiting only for an opportunity to confront his accusers. He ended on a cordial note. "I thank you again for your candour, and I believe that on your return you will find that we are worthy of your esteem." He signed himself "Your very devoted servant".

But before this letter could reach the Colonel, another letter for Damodar was precipitated to Ooty and fell from the ceiling into his lap. This time it was from the Mahatma Morya, Madame Blavatsky's personal Guru, and was addressed to Dr. Hartmann. Morya explained that Madame Coulomb had opened communications with the Society's enemies, the missionaries, and that M. Coulomb, a skilled carpenter, was constructing trap-doors, etc., and he urged Dr. Hartmann to act without delay. On the envelope of his hasty letter with its irrevocable instructions, was an order to Damodar to let Dr. Hartmann have it at once.

The Coulombs and the Committee appointed by the Society for Psychical Research contend that this letter was really from Madame Blavatsky, a view which they support by the fact that it coincided with the arrival of the mail-boat from Europe.

While it was making its way to India, either by mail-boat from France or by precipitation from Tibet, Madame Coulomb wrote to Madame Blavatsky, threatening to take forty or so of her letters—letters which cast a new and unfavourable light on Madame Blavatsky—to her enemies, the Protestant missionaries. In reply, H.P.B. wired: "What can be done? Telegraph." But it was too late: the Coulombs had already been ejected from Adyar, after a policeman, summoned by M. Coulomb, had been punched in the head by Mr. Lane-Fox.

Chapter Twenty-two

THE THIEF OF SOULS

In the summer of 1884 Sinnett's greatest wish—to have direct personal contact with his Master, Koot Hoomi, and not through Madame Blavatsky—was fulfilled. This is how it happened.

Mrs. Laura Holloway, a young, pretty and celebrated medium—the papers were full of stories about her psychic gifts—had arrived from America, and was staying with the Arundales in Notting Hill Gate. She had read *The Occult World*, and had been so fascinated by the accounts of Koot Hoomi that she had come to England to seek Sinnett out and to write books herself.

The Sinnetts found her "an attractive personality", and in June Mrs. Holloway left the Arundales and came to stay with them. Koot Hoomi was, of course, one of the main subjects of conversation, and Mrs. Holloway went into trances and contacted the Beloved Master on the astral plane, and had long conversations with him. On at least one occasion she brought back from the astral a message from K.H. for Sinnett: it was an exhortation to him to have courage and not get downhearted at the difficulties which lay ahead, difficulties which had not yet arisen. And on the evening of 6 July, Koot Hoomi took complete possession of Mrs. Holloway and spoke directly to Alfred Percy Sinnett, to his intense joy.

When Madame Blavatsky came to London at the end of June and heard all about it—she was staying with the Arundales at 77 Elgin Crescent, Notting Hill—she was furious. It was clear that she was jealous, said Sinnett, of his having made contact with Koot Hoomi independently of her.

Very shortly afterwards, Sinnett received a letter from Koot Hoomi, in which the Master plainly informed him that He had never communicated with him through Mrs. Holloway, and that the voice Mrs. Holloway had heard was not His voice, but the Devil's. She was, anyhow, only an undeveloped clairvoyante. Koot Hoomi urged Sinnett to stop meddling in Mrs. Holloway's affairs, and to keep to the path indicated by "the old woman" [H.P.B.]. Sinnett had never before received a letter from K.H. in this threatening tone. He was convinced it was a fabrication of Madame Blavatsky's. Mrs. Holloway also received a letter from Koot Hoomi: He ordered her to return to the Arundales. Feeling frightened, she packed up and went. Sinnett was shocked to think that the Old Lady could do such a thing—take the Master's name and handwriting in vain. Angry letters between him and H.P.B. went backwards and forwards, and he saw his theosophical career coming to an abrupt end. Perhaps the advice of Koot Hoomi, which he had received through Mrs. Holloway—*not to despair*, *but to have courage*—saved the situation for him. But before the quarrel could degenerate any further, Madame Blavatsky departed for Germany, taking Mrs. Holloway with her.

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The Theosophical Society, with its hundred branches in India, was now attracting people with a mystical bent from far and wide. To Sinnett's house in London there came in 1884 the Countess Wachtmeister, wife of a Swedish diplomat. She had read *Isis Unveiled*, and was filled with admiration, and even wonder, for its author. In Sinnett's house, at 7 Ladbroke Gardens, Notting Hill, she found H.P.B. sitting on a low ottoman, and round her on the floor, gazing up at her, a circle of adoring men and women. Mrs. Sinnett introduced her, and then the Countess went and sat on one side, not on the floor, but she was no less enchanted by "the thief of souls" as Solov'yov calls her. The Countess was not an experienced writer and her description of H.P.B. turns into a revealment of her own unguarded feelings. "Her features were instinct with power, and expressed an innate nobility of character . . . what chiefly arrested my attention was the steady gaze of her wonderful grey eyes, piercing, yet calm and inscrutable: they shone with a serene light which seemed to penetrate and unveil the secrets of the heart."

Another soul, it seems, had been enchanted away.

Miss Francesca Arundale also had her soul stolen after the first glance at Madame Blavatsky. Her interest in spiritualism had brought her to Sinnett's *Occult World*. After reading it, she joined the Society, was present at the meeting on 30 June when Madame Blavatsky made her dramatic entry. Miss Arundale describes in her little book, *My Guest—H. P. Blavatsky*, how the handsome Mohini rose immediately from his seat and prostrated himself at H.P.B.'s feet as if she were the Great Mogul. "In after days when I grew to know her better," wrote Miss Arundale, "I have found in H.P.B. much that I did not then recognize, but never have I found her power so great, so compelling, as in that first moment of contact with that strange and marvellous being, the writer of *The Secret Doctrine*, the messenger from the Masters, whose loyal and devoted servant she ever was."

Another lady, Frau Gebhard, had come to Sinnett's door all the way from Germany. She had been a pupil of the great Abbé Alphonse Louis Constant, the French mage and Cabbalist better known as Eliphas Lévi, who, among other exploits, had raised the shade of the divine Apollonius of Tyana in London during the summer of 1854.

Through not knowing the password, Frau Gebhard was refused admission, but she insisted that she was a theosophist —Lévi was now dead and his mantle had fallen on to the shoulders of Madame Blavatsky—and would not go away. In the end Sinnett himself opened the door to her with profuse apologies. Frau Gebhard and A. P. Sinnett became great friends, and in the summer of 1883 the Sinnetts were invited to the Gebhards' home at Elberfeld in western Germany. The following year, H.P.B., Mohini, Mrs. Holloway and others—a large party—were invited over, but not Sinnett, to his indignation. H.P.B., he says, had given orders that he was to be kept away.

From Elberfeld, H.P.B. wrote to Solov'yov, "This is a charming little town, and a charming family of theosophists. It is a large, splendid house. Frau Gebhard was a pupil of Eliphas Lévi and she is mad about occultism. Why don't you come here for a few days?"

Eliphas Lévi died in 1875 and was reincarnated six months later as Aleister Crowley, or so Crowley told me: fragments of his life as Lévi came into his vision while entranced on Oesopus Island.* For seven years Frau Gebhard sat at Lévi's feet: she and Baron Spedalieri were his only pupils. She was initiated into the mysteries of High Magic and the Cabbala, but all she tells us of the great French mage was that his habits were dirty, his appetite enormous, that he craved for rich foods, and drank much wine, and that to watch him eat was "a matter of wonder". On an upper floor of the Gebhard mansion at Elberfeld was an Occult Room, the walls of which were lined with books on magic. Frau Gebhard, like the Countess Wachtmeister, was English by birth. Her link with the great French magician made her additionally interesting to H.P.B. who had never met him. It would have been a great moment in the history of occultism if the Abbé Constant and the youthful Madame Blavatsky, back from one of her flying visits to Tibet, had been brought face to face in some Parisian drawing-room.

Solov'yov had sworn to himself that he wouldn't stop until he had found out all about Madame Blavatsky and her phenomena. He didn't expect her to drop her mask and to tell him the simple truth: that would be asking too much. But he had observed that she was highly indiscreet and impulsive, and this encouraged him to be patient. Her strength, and the secret of her success, he decided, lay in "her extraordinary cynicism and contempt for mankind".

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*John Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley*, 1958.

He felt he needed a change of air and a rest: he left Paris for Elberfeld. On the way, he stayed at the Grand Hotel, Brussels, where he ran into a friend and compatriot, the daughter of a Russian ambassador. He does not divulge her name, but refers to her as Miss A. When she heard that he was *en route* to the famous Madame Blavatsky, she immediately wanted to come too. Solov'yov thought this an excellent idea.

They spent the rest of the day together talking about the supernatural. In spite of his scepticism towards Madame Blavatsky and her phenomena, Solov'yov was a firm believer in "powers beyond the realm of matter". He went to bed with his mind so enlivened that he couldn't sleep, and tossed and turned the whole night. At seven he got up, dressed and drank tea. At eight, a note came from Miss A. saying that she hadn't slept a wink all night and, what was worse, had lost all her keys, and couldn't open any of her cases. A locksmith was called; by the time he had arrived and had opened a case—in which were found the lost keys, including the one which belonged to that particular case—they had missed their train to Elberfeld.

After having decided on a later train, a walk in the city was proposed, but as they were about to set off, Solov'yov felt exhausted, excused himself and went to his room. He lay on the bed, his eyes closed, but did not sleep. Instead he had this odd experience: several strange landscapes, clear and distinct, passed before his internal vision. They were so beautiful that he was afraid to move in case they vanished: they disappeared finally in a mist. He opened his eyes: his tiredness had gone. He rejoined Miss A. and told her about it all, described every detail.

Shortly afterwards they took their seats in the train, and after a while Miss A., who was looking out of the window, exclaimed:

"I say! Look: there is one of your landscapes!"

Solov'yov gazed out of the window. The effect, he says, was almost painful. There was no doubt about it. There was the landscape of his vision. What made the whole experience amazing was that he had never been in this part of the world before. "Till it became dark, I gazed upon the landscapes I had seen as I lay in bed that morning with my eyes closed."

When Solov'yov arrived at the house of the merchant Gebhard—"the best house in Elberfeld"—he found H.P.B. swollen with dropsy, almost motionless in a huge armchair, and surrounded by Olcott, Mohini, Mrs. and Miss Arundale, Mrs. Holloway, Bertram Keightley, and the Gebhards. She was delighted to see him and Miss A.; she became lively, jerked herself up in her chair and began "to let off steam" in Russian, to the displeasure of those around her.

"I've a surprise for you," she said.

The large drawing-room was divided by an arch from which hung thick curtains. Presently the curtains were drawn back to reveal two wonderful figures, lit up by a brilliant bluish light, concentrated and strengthened by mirrors.

At first Solov'yov thought he was looking at living men; then he realized that they were only two draped oil portraits of the Mahatmas Morya and Koot Hoomi. They had not been painted from the life, but in the Astral Light by the German artist Schmiechen. H.P.B. said the likeness was amazing.

After looking at the portraits for more than an hour—kept there by H.P.B. and the Colonel—Solov'yov's head began to ache.

On the way back to their hotel, Solov'yov and Miss A. could talk of nothing else but the wonderful portraits of the Masters. And when Solov'yov blew out the candle to go to sleep, he seemed to see the stern face of Morya staring at him in the darkness. He shut his eyes, but he could still see Morya, as painted in the Astral Light by the artist Schmiechen. He fell asleep.

Suddenly he awoke, but he was not sure, when he came to think about it afterwards, that he was really awake. Perhaps he was dreaming that he was awake. Anyhow, he was in the same room; a glance at his watch revealed that it was two o'clock in the morning. And there, in the semi-gloom, was rising up the tall figure of a man in white. Then he heard a voice, or rather felt that a voice had spoken to him, bidding him light the candle. He was not in the least surprised or alarmed. He lit the candle, but the vision did not fade. There was a living man before him, and it was none other—an exact replica, so to speak—of the Mahatma Morya.

Morya sat down in the chair beside the bed, and told Solov'yov, in a language which Solov'yov describes as "unknown but understandable", of various things of interest to him.

"Among other things, he told me that if I wanted to see his astral form I should have to go through many preparations, and that the last lesson had been given to me in the morning when I saw, with closed eyes, the landscapes which I afterwards passed on my way to Elberfeld. I had, he said, a great and developing magnetic strength. I asked how I was to use it, but instead of replying, he vanished. I imagined that I sprang after him, but the door was locked. I began to think it was a hallucination and that I was going mad. But there was the Mahatma Morya back again in his place, motionless, with his glance fixed upon me exactly the same as he had been imprinted on my mind. His head shook; he smiled and said, again in the soundless and mental language of dreams, 'Be assured that I'm not a hallucination and that you're not going out of your mind. Madame Blavatsky will prove to you tomorrow before everybody that my visit was true'."

With this Morya vanished. Solov'yov looked at his watch: it was three o'clock. He blew out the candle and fell asleep.

He awoke at ten o'clock and everything that had happened in the night was perfectly clear to him. But the door of his bedroom was locked from the inside. Unfortunately he couldn't tell from the candle whether he'd been burning it in the night, for he'd lit it before going to bed.

In the dining-room he found Miss A. at breakfast.

"Did you have a good night?" he asked her.

"Not very. I have seen the Mahatma Morya."

"No! I've seen him, too."

Solov'yov immediately wished he could snatch this sentence back.

"How did you see him?" asked Miss A. breathlessly.

He told her about his "clear dream or hallucination"; and she told him that Mahatma Morya had appeared before her and said to her, "We have great need of a little beetle like you." To be asked to join the Theosophical Society in those frank words was irresistible, and Miss A. told Solov'yov that she seriously thought of becoming a professed theosophist straight away.

They set off eagerly for Madame Blavatsky.

What is extraordinary about this story is that it's told by the sceptical Solov'yov, whom theosophists have hung in their Rogues' Gallery along with the Coulombs and other traitors and failures. It suggests that the Mahatmas do really live and have their being, can read the thoughts of men, walk through locked hotel doors, travel enormous distances in a flash, and so on. The Tibetan scholar, Evans Wentz, seems to think so, judging by his introduction to the biography of Milarepa.* Like Morya, Milarepa could easily have descended on Solov'yov and Miss A. in the middle of the night without any trouble at all.

At the Gebhard mansion they found H.P.B. with an enigmatic smile. "Well," she said, "what sort of a night did you have?"

"Excellent," said Solov'yov guardedly; then he carelessly added, "Haven't you something to tell me?"

"Nothing in particular. I only know that the Master, with one of his *chelas*, has been with you."

I should have thought this conclusive, and would have capitulated to Madame Blavatsky at once, but Solov'yov, to my surprise, was not impressed at all. He thought it of no

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**Tibet's Great Yogi, Milarepa*, Oxford University Press.

evidential value whatsoever, but Miss A. thought it all wonderful, to H.P.B.'s delight. She turned scornfully on Solov'yov and called him a Doubting Thomas and a Suspecter.

The following day Frederic Myers of the Society for Psychical Research arrived at the Gebhards' home and had a long and earnest talk with Solov'yov. He begged him to communicate his vision of Morya to the Society. Presumably Myers heard astral bells and raps—the ordinary phenomena produced by the mere presence of H.P.B. (Mr. Geoffrey Watkins, owner of the well-known bookshop in Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road, London, told me that while his father was working with Madame Blavatsky, raps were heard on the walls and furniture, but neither took any notice.)

Chapter Twenty-three

DOWNFALL

"FROM end to end of India," wrote the Rev. George Patterson, the editor of the Madras *Christian College Magazine*, "the fame of Koot Hoomi has been spread, and the marvels done in his name have had all the effects of miraculous seals upon the utterances of his agents. One by one, Indian sceptics have bowed their heads before the Mahatmas. . . ."

He then proceeded to demolish the fame of Koot Hoomi by printing with comments and explanations a selection of the letters which Madame Coulomb had brought him. A further selection was announced for the next issue during the following month.

It was the talk of India. A summary was cabled to Europe, and was reported in *The Times* of 20 September.

The original letters were printed with English translations alongside, for Madame Blavatsky had written to Madame Coulomb in French.

This letter was sent from Ooty, just before General Morgan's visit to Adyar in the summer of 1883. Marquis, the Rev. Patterson tells us, was H.P.B.'s nickname for M. Coulomb. Mme. Coulomb was sometimes called Marquise.

> My dear Madame Coulomb and Marquis,
>
> This is the moment for us to come out—*do not let us hide ourselves.* The General is leaving this [place] for Madras on business. He will be there on Monday and will remain there for two days. He is President of the Society here [Ooty] and wishes to see the *shrine*. It is probable that he will put some question or perhaps he may be contented with looking. But it is certain that he expects a

> phenomenon, for he told me so. In the first case beg K.H., whom you see every day, or Christofolo, to keep up the honour of the family. Tell him that a flower will be sufficient, and that *if the pot breaks* under its load of curiosity it would be well to replace it *at once*. Damn the others. This one is worth his weight in gold. For the love of God, or of any one you please, *do not miss* this opportunity, for we shall never have another. I am not there and that is the beauty of the thing. I rely on you and beg you not to disappoint me, for all my projects and my future depend on you. . . .
>
> Heartily yours,
>
> Luna Melanconica

Madame Blavatsky gave everybody nicknames: Koot Hoomi was Christofolo.

One day she said to her witch-like assistant, who fitted well into Madame Blavatsky's hashish-enchanted imagination:

"See if you can make a head of human size, and place it on that divan." She pointed to the sofa in the corner of the room. "With a sheet round it, it would have a magic effect by moonlight."

Madame Coulomb wondered what on earth she was up to now, but she was not unwilling to help; she confesses that she would lie awake at night torturing her brain to find ways and means of doing something which would please H.P.B. Besides, H.P.B. was very disagreeable "when stroked on the wrong side".

There and then H.P.B. cut out a paper pattern of the face she wished Madame Coulomb to make for her.

". . . On this I cut the precious lineaments of the beloved Master, but, to my shame, I must say that, after all my trouble of cutting, sewing, and stuffing, Madame said that it looked like an old Jew—I suppose she meant Shylock."

With a graceful touch here and there with a paint-brush, H.P.B. gave the dummy a slightly more pleasing appearance. Madame Coulomb made its jacket, which she adroitly stuffed to form the shoulders and chest. The arms were cut short, only to the elbow, for they "would be in the way of him who had to carry it".

Thus "Christofolo" was born. And under the bright Indian moon he was carried on the head of M. Coulomb to make the faithful believe that this was the astral body of Koot Hoomi.

His life was unexpectedly short, for while H.P.B. was in Simla, Madame Coulomb burnt him in a fit of disgust.

"Oh, my poor Christofolo!" wrote H.P.B. when she heard about it. "He is dead then, and you have killed him? Oh, my dear friend, if you only knew how I would like to see him revive! . . . My blessing on my poor Christofolo."

In these explosive revelations it was explained how letters, purporting to come from Mahatmas Koot Hoomi and Morya in Tibet, were dropped from the branches of trees and through apertures in floorboards. "In order that you may easily understand how the letter slipped through, I shall have to tell you that the opening of the trap was performed by the pulling of a string, which, after running from the trap, where it was fastened, all along the garret above Mr. Sinnett's room to that part of the garret above Madame Blavatsky's bedroom, passed through a hole and hung down behind the door and the curtain of her room, which was adjoining to that of Mr. Sinnett."*

If what Madame Coulomb says about Madame Blavatsky is true—and her words breathe the harsh spirit of truth—then Madame Blavatsky was one of the world's great jokers. Sinnett, at least, admitted that H.P.B. had employed M. Coulomb to drop a letter through the rafters on to his head.

When the news of these revelations broke, H.P.B. hurried back to England to consult Sinnett, who calmly but unhelpfully pointed out that her style was as unmistakable as a thumb-print, and that Madame Coulomb hadn't the ability to

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***Some Account of my Intercourse with Madame Blavatsky from 1872 to 1884*. By Madame Coulomb.

concoct such letters.* To this, H.P.B. replied that it was true that she had written the letters, but that Madame Coulomb had inserted the incriminating passages. This explanation drew Sinnett back from the brink of disbelief. If only, he thought, the Old Lady had stayed in India, this plot which had brought about her downfall—he was in no doubt that it was a downfall—would never have taken place. "To the end she would have been crowned with the halo of her fame as a great occultist and magician and enthusiasts making pilgrimages to visit her in India would never have been disillusioned."

Another letter reproduced in the *Christian College Magazine* was written by H.P.B. while *en route* to France.

> Suez.
>
> My Dear Friend,
>
> Since our departure the Colonel has done nothing but bore me about that blessed bill of Oakes'. He pretends that you have proved to him that about 700 and odd rupees of that account of Rs. 864 have been spent for me personally for my rooms, etc. Will you then, I pray you, send me a detailed account of the items? Let me know what I have spent for the furniture of the lower storey and for that of the upper one which I occupy. I have been very stupid to pay money from my own pocket so often for the lower rooms, if it is so. I beg you do it. You ought to have Oakes' bills somewhere, the detailed accounts I mean.
>
> They were all wretchedly sick the first day, except Olcott and myself. Mohini and Babula have brought up their dinners for the whole year 1883. Now it is very fine and calm. We are seven on board, and the captain is the most delightful man in the world. They treat me here as an old idol, and I should be most happy if it was not for that eternal squabble about Oakes. Just fancy, what an idiot he [Olcott] is! He said to me the other day that *he was much afraid* lest the Society, in becoming rich, should become vicious and proud; and that he did not quite know whether he ought to accept or refuse Mr. Lane-Fox's offer to endow the Society. O God! Was there ever such a —— ?

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*G. M. Williams, *Priestess of the Occult.*

The last word, both in the French original and the translation, has unfortunately been excised. "Consideration for the feelings of our French readers forbids us to print the word omitted," wrote the editor. "Suffice it to say that it is used only by the lowest of low Marseilles sailors."

H.P.B. wrote to *The Times* denouncing the letters as forgeries.

In October, the Colonel, accompanied by Herr Gebhard, set out for India; and shortly afterwards H.P.B. followed. Before she left 77 Elgin Crescent, Koot Hoomi precipitated a final letter to her hostess, Miss Arundale, in which he said, "You know, of course, that once H.P.B.'s aura in the house is exhausted, you can have no more letters from me." H.P.B. took with her to India a young married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Cooper-Oakley who intended making theosophy their life's work, and India their permanent home. At Port Said they were joined by a tall young clergyman, Charles Webster Leadbeater; and they interrupted their journey to go to Cairo to make inquiries about the Coulombs. Ransom's *Short History of the Theosophical Society* says that the theosophists were received by the Prime Minister of Egypt, Nubar Pasha, who invited them to dinner. During this short stay in Cairo, Mr. Leadbeater discovered that Madame Coulomb had at one time been employed as a governess there, and was given the sack through "endeavouring to instil vicious ideas into the minds of her charges". In virtuous indignation or in utter delight, he communicated this story to the Indian press. Years later, when he had risen to the top rank in the theosophic hierarchy, he was himself accused of a similar misdemeanour which produced widespread disaffection. As C. Jinarajadasa, the Vice-President, and later President, of the Society, tactfully put it in *The Golden Book*, "In 1906, the Society was plunged into a most unexpected issue. It was asserted that C. W. Leadbeater, who was very prominent as a writer and lecturer, had been giving to youths advice on the subject of their sex difficulties which many members thought utterly incompatible with his teachings as a theosophist."

A strange little book called *The Theosophical Society and its Esoteric Bogeydom*, written by one F. T. Brooks and published in 1914, has this to say of Mr. Leadbeater, who was then still alive. "In 1899 I met him several times on the Continent. In June, 1900, I spent a quiet month in his little house at Ealing.... Mr. Leadbeater's chief traits were clairvoyance, and fondness for boys and tapioca-pudding."*

Madame Blavatsky and Leadbeater proceeded together to Colombo, where Leadbeater, in the presence of a vast crowd, took *Pansil* from the High Priest Sumangala. The event created a sensation because it was the first time that an ordained minister of the Church had publicly declared himself to be a follower of the Buddha.

Meanwhile, Dr. Hartmann, feeling he should do something, produced a pamphlet† in which the charges of conspiracy and fraud against the Theosophical Society are vigorously denied and, by calling M. and Mme. Coulomb liars and forgers, hurled back into the teeth of the missionaries of the Scottish Free Church.

The Coulombs, whose photographs are not reproduced in *The Golden Book of the Theosophical Society*, have been only names up till now, or, if you will, hostile forces. They are apostates, traitors, conspirators, enemies of the Cause and no one, except Dr. Hartmann, had thought of describing them. Through the doctor's faded and rare pamphlet of thirty-two pages, a copy of which is preserved in the British Museum library, they spring to some semblance of life.

"Imagine," wrote Dr. Hartmann of Madame Coulomb, "a weird witch-like creature, with wrinkled features, a stinging look and an uncouth form. Her duty was to patronize the servants, to nurse like a mother a decrepit old horse and

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*"Of course, you know that Madame Blavatsky lives now in a masculine body which she took directly she left the other one," said Leadbeater in a speech delivered in Sydney, Australia, in 1917. "When she left that body, of which you have a very inadequate portrait over there [*pointing to her photograph on the wall*], she stepped into the body of an Indian boy, then about fourteen years old. It was a misfit for Madame."

†*Report of Observations made during a Nine-months' Stay at the Headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, India*, 1884.

several mangy dogs, which were unable to walk. She seemed to consider it her special purpose of life to pry into everybody's private affairs, pick up stray letters . . . for the purpose of studying the handwriting. She attempted to wriggle herself into the confidence of newcomers, and had a way of finding out their secrets in pretending to tell their fortunes by means of a pack of cards. . . . If asked to explain herself she would say: 'My mouth is shut up, I cannot talk against the people whose bread I eat'."

Her husband is described in terms equally unflattering: these are, of course, caricature portraits, but they are better than none, and they fit well into the doleful scene—the disciples living alone at Adyar without the Great Mistress of Ceremonies, Madame Blavatsky.

"Having paid our respects to Madame Coulomb, it behoves us to look at the appendix. Imagine a ghostly-looking Frenchman with the complexion of an ash-barrel, to which is attached a black beard. While he speaks with you, his one glass eye stares you out of countenance, and his other eye with characteristic politeness wanders out of your way."

According to Hartmann, Madame Coulomb had sworn to revenge herself on Madame Blavatsky who had foiled her attempt to borrow 2,000 rupees from an Indian rajah, Prince Harisinghjee Rupsinghjee.

Then there took place "a great row" between M. and Mme. Coulomb. Hartmann had offered to pay their expenses to America, and even to give them his shares in a gold mine in Colorado. M. Coulomb wanted to accept, but Madame disagreed. In the end, M. Coulomb said he couldn't leave headquarters before Madame Blavatsky's return.

The phenomena of the Shrine, according to the revelations in the *Christian College Magazine*, were effected by means of a removable panel in the back of it, and a hole in the wall, so that anyone in Madame Blavatsky's bedroom next door could have easy and secret access to it. Hartmann riposted by asserting that M. Coulomb, the handyman, had made the concealed door and the hidden hole in the wall after the Founders had left for Europe. In this consisted their conspiracy. As a final argument he pointed out that the letters must be forgeries "because they attempt to prove too much and contain passages such as no sane person would write".

Chapter Twenty-four

KOOT HOOMI IN TROUBLE

WHEN the Colonel arrived back at Madras on 15 November, 1884, he was greeted with wild enthusiasm by three hundred cheering students of the Christian College, whose magazine had been tearing his beloved Master to pieces in a series of articles entitled "The Collapse of Koot Hoomi". But what did the students care about that? They threw garlands round the Colonel's neck, sprinkled him with scented water, and carried him off in triumph. He was the champion of their nationalist aspirations. Koot Hoomi may have collapsed, but they would do all they could to see that the Colonel and his celebrated companion, Madame Blavatsky, didn't collapse as well. As the *Indian Chronicle* put it:

> "We are not Theosophists ourselves . . . but we have a great respect for the founders of the Theosophical Society. It is the only foreign movement which appeals to the national feeling of India . . . and instead of being made the butt of ridicule, and its leaders the subject of persecution, it ought to be patiently nourished. The Christian scoffers are perhaps not aware that the existence of Mahatmas is universally believed throughout India, and it is preposterous to suppose that the Padres of Madras will do any serious harm to that belief."

An even greater reception was given to H.P.B. when, a month later, she reached Madras accompanied by Buddhist Leadbeater. She was met at the quayside by a large Committee of Welcome, garlanded and escorted in procession to a hall crowded to suffocation. Wrote the Colonel: "They rose to their feet and gave vent to their feelings in a roar of cheers and vivas as she slowly walked through the press to the platform, her hand nervously gripping my arm, her mouth set like iron, her eyes full of glad light and almost swimming in tears of joy."

When the cheering subsided, she made the first and only speech of her career, saying that not one of the letters, as it stood, had been written by her. She would be the greatest fool in the world to commit herself so that she might be accused of such vile, disgusting things. . . .

The Colonel says that H.P.B. had come back to India for the purpose of prosecuting for libel Madame Coulomb and Mr. Patterson and anybody else she could, but he refused to start proceedings for her until the Convention of the Theosophical Society, due to meet on 27 December, had given their approval. The Convention met, a Committee of Investigation was set up, and after much thought and heart-searching it was decided to advise H.P.B. not to prosecute. The members of the Committee of Investigation—there were three lawyers among them—plainly saw that a trial to rehabilitate Madame Blavatsky's reputation would turn only into a trial of Esoteric Philosophy and of the existence of the Mahatmas—"subjects the most sacred, not only to Hindus but to occultists of all religions . . . the prospect is shocking to their feelings".

This was a sensible decision, but it had an unhelpful result, for the failure of Madame Blavatsky to prosecute Madame Coulomb was construed by those on the side of the missionaries, and by no small number of theosophists, too, as an admission of guilt.

As soon as the Convention was over, the Colonel and Leadbeater went off to Burma together to preach the word.

The Coulomb revelations—if one may call them so—made the Society for Psychical Research decide to send Australian-born Richard Hodgson to India, to investigate the Marvellous Phenomena on the spot. He left for Madras in November, 1884. He had read Moral Sciences at Cambridge and graduated with honours, was twenty-nine years of age and full of energy, but, according to theosophists, devoid of experience and hopelessly inadequate for the task.

During December the Society for Psychical Research published their First Report of the "Committee appointed to investigate the evidence for Marvellous Phenomena offered by certain members of the Theosophical Society". They gave it this title, and issued it for private circulation only, because they realized that until Richard Hodgson returned from India they could arrive at no final conclusions. Even without Hodgson's findings, they had grown suspicious of the claims of theosophy. It was not that Madame Blavatsky had declined to produce phenomena in their presence, but that information had come their way, in addition to that supplied by Madame Coulomb, which made them decide that "no amount of caution can be excessive in dealing with evidence of this kind". The information in particular which had diverted them towards suspicion was known as "the Kiddle incident".

Henry Kiddle was an American lecturer on spiritualism, and while reading *The Occult World* during 1883 he had discovered that Koot Hoomi had plagiarized about twenty-four lines from one of his speeches. He had delivered the speech in question in August, 1880, at Lake Pleasant—that is, a year before *The Occult World* was published—and shortly afterwards it was printed in the spiritualist *Banner of Light*. Since Kiddle couldn't get in touch with Koot Hoomi, he wrote to Sinnett, but received no reply. He therefore published a letter of complaint in the London spiritualist magazine *Light*, and it was taken up by the whole spiritualist press.

"Koot Hoomi *plagiarized* from Kiddle! Ye gods and little fishes," wrote H.P.B. "And suppose *he has not*? Of course *they*, the subtle metaphysicians, will not believe the true version of the story as *I now know it*. If they knew what it was to *dictate mentally* a *precipitation*—at 300 miles distance. . . . Plagiarize from *The Banner of Light*! !—that sweet spirits' slop-basin—the asses!"

In due course Koot Hoomi gave his explanation in more dignified language. He had been tired at the time and dictating to an inexperienced *chela* who asked him to look over the letter, but he imprudently replied, "Anyhow will do my boy; it is of no great importance if you skip a few words." But the real explanation seems to be that, some months before, Koot Hoomi had "turned his mind" towards the speeches being made at Lake Pleasant, and some detached sentences had been caught up and impressed upon his memory.

Frederic Myers, Gurney and company of the Society for Psychical Research did not accept Koot Hoomi's explanation. Their conclusion, if any conclusion is to be extracted from this rambling First Report, was that ". . . it is certain that fraud has been practised by persons connected with the [Theosophical] Society".

On 5 February the Report was put into H.P.B.'s hands as she lay ill in bed, suffering from Bright's disease or heart disease or rheumatic gout or perhaps all three. After reading it, she wrote on the paper cover:

> "Madame Blavatsky, who will soon be dead and gone, for she is doomed, says this to her friends of the Society for Psychical Research: After my death these phenomena, which are the direct cause of my premature death, will take place better than ever. But whether dead or alive, I will be ever imploring my friends and Brothers never to make them public, never to sacrifice their rest, their honour, to satisfy public curiosity on the empty pretext of science. Read the book. Never, throughout my long and sad life, never was there so much of uncalled-for, contemptuous suspicion and contempt lavished upon an innocent woman as I find here in these pages published by so-called friends.
>
> "H. P. Blavatsky, on my death bed."

Mary Scharlieb and Franz Hartmann, H.P.B.'s doctors, thought she was dying. Damodar sent a cablegram to the Colonel, who immediately left the court of Theebaw III, King of Burma, and hurried back to Adyar, after writing in his diary: "Poor old chum! No more sleep for me that night."

She was overjoyed to see him; she put her arms round his neck and wept on his breast. For his part, the Colonel was unspeakably glad to be beside her, and to assure her, before dashing back to Burma in order to help with the translation of his *Buddhist Catechism* into Burmese, of his steadfastness. Dr. Scharlieb and Dr. Hartmann said it was a miracle that she was still alive—a miracle performed by Morya: while they had been waiting for her last gasp, the Teacher (Morya) had come, laid his hand on her and snatched her back from death. They hadn't actually seen Morya but they had felt his invisible presence.

It seems that the Colonel wrote about his steadfastness towards his chum, H.P.B., as a kind of introduction to her lack of steadfastness towards him. He had already pointed out in the first volume of *Old Diary Leaves* that she was devoid of loyalty: to her, all of them were "nothing more than pawns in a game of chess". While he had been preaching Buddhism to the Buddhists of Burma, Mr. Lane-Fox and Dr. Hartmann had put their heads together and thought out a scheme for the better running of the Theosophical Society. The main point of it was that the Colonel should be deposed, and that they, with three other people, making in all a committee of five, should be set up instead. H.P.B. foolishly fell in with this scheme and signed a paper authorizing the Colonel's dethronement. Thus, when the Colonel was hurriedly called back from Burma, he was confronted with the new régime. Bewildered and aggrieved, he stood with the paper in his hand beside his "chum's" bed and demanded to know if this was her idea of justice. H.P.B. could only moan with embarrassment. With tears in his eyes he asked her if, after he had built up the Society, he was "to be turned out on the road to go hang, without a word of thanks or even so much as the 'chit' or character certificate".

They had brought the paper to her dying-bed, she explained, and they had told her it was all for the good of the Society. She had not known what she was signing, and she begged the Colonel to tear it up. But the Colonel was too hurt in his feelings to do this, and he decided to keep it as a document of historic interest. He had it before him when, years later, he began to write his *Old Diary Leaves*.

The crisis had produced some hard thinking and heart-searching on the part of late-Secretary-to-the-Government-of-India Hume. The Society was rocking on its foundations—letters of resignation from outlying branches were arriving with every post—and Hume thought that, if it was to be saved from crashing to the ground, it would have to be reorganized. He therefore put forward at a meeting on 14 March a revisionist programme. They should, he said, accept Madame Blavatsky's and the Colonel's resignations, and Dr. Hartmann, who had published another pamphlet* on the crisis, should withdraw them both for they contained, as they all now knew, false information. But these proposals were rejected as too desperate. The only thing that happened was that on 21 March H.P.B. resigned from her post of Corresponding Secretary: the Colonel, who had returned to Burma, carried on as before.

Hume's faith had been shaken, and from thinking that the "Coulomb letters" must be forgeries—for Madame Blavatsky "was too clever to have thus committed herself"—he had come to believe that most of the phenomena were false. (He had never had much belief in the Shrine business, anyhow.)

Hodgson arrived at Madras on 18 December, 1884, which was two days before the return of Madame Blavatsky. He proceeded straightway to Adyar, and asked permission to see the Shrine. Damodar, who kept the key of the Occult Room in his pocket, declined to let him in, said he must wait till the return of the Founders: the Colonel was away, too, having gone to Colombo to meet H.P.B.

Damodar had even refused to open the door to William

***Report of the result of an investigation into the charges against Madame Blavatsky brought by the Missionaries of the Scottish Free Church at Madras and examined by a Committee appointed for that purpose by the General Council of the Theosophical Society*. Madras, 1885.

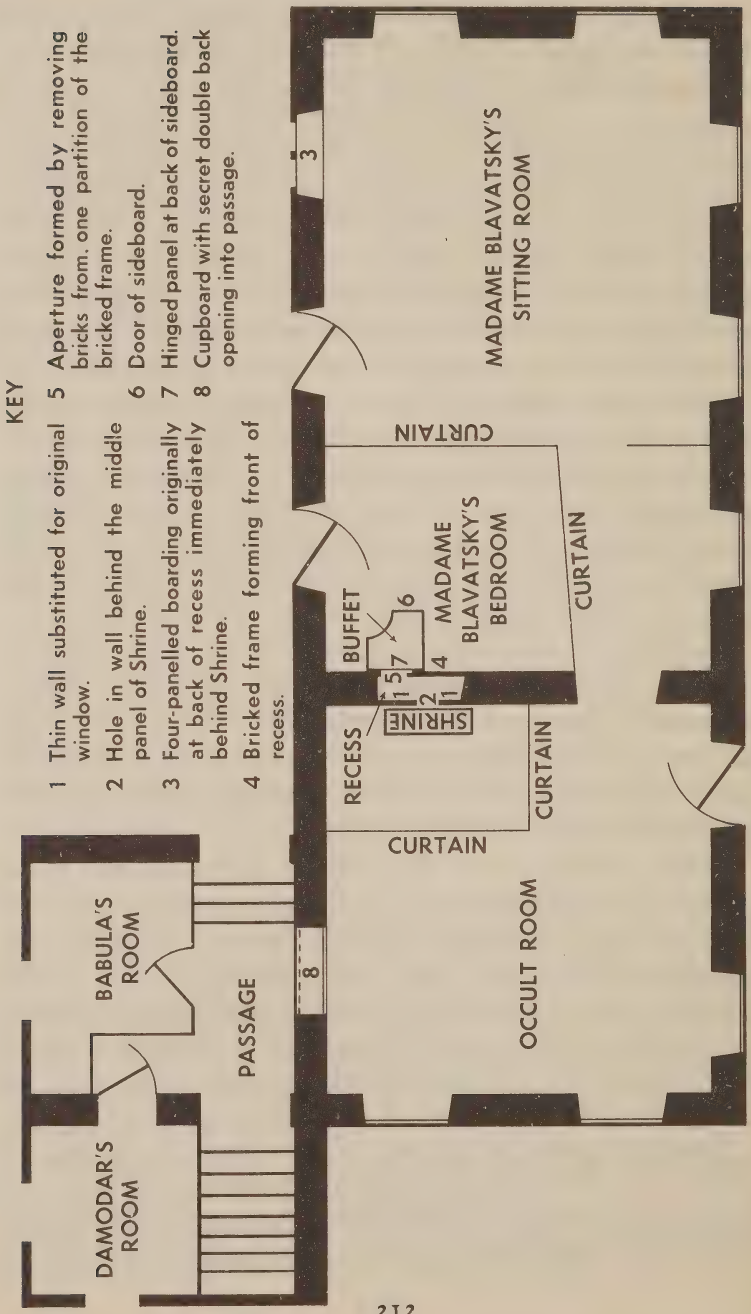
Quan Judge, who had arrived at Adyar in the summer. In the end he had to give way, and a party of theosophists entered the Occult Room and began to examine the Shrine, which was a cupboard of cedar wood, black lacquered, about four feet square and fifteen inches deep. (Moncure Conway thought it was about five feet high by four wide.) It was placed against the wall which divided Madame Blavatsky's boudoir from the Occult Room—a most unfortunate position if there was no fraudulent intent, observed Hodgson—and suspended by thick iron wires attached to hooks in the ceiling. It was enclosed by curtains seven feet high which were drawn aside when anyone wished to consult it, a theatrical effect but entirely legitimate, for it increased the solemnity of the occasion.

A pious Indian theosophist called T. Vijiarghava Charlu, or Ananda for short, who had an official position at Adyar, struck the back of the Shrine with his hand, exclaiming, "You see, it's quite solid." Whereupon, to his surprise and consternation, the middle panel of the back flew up.

In these circumstances, which could be so easily misjudged, they thought it best to remove the Shrine. It was removed to Damodar's room, and then, on the night of the following day, 20 September, it was taken out into the garden, broken to pieces and burnt. Dr. Hartmann kept as a relic two pieces, which he wrapped in brown paper.

When Hodgson, who was staying at Adyar, was at last admitted to the Occult Room, he found the walls covered with fresh plaster. He was told that all traces of the Coulombs' treacherous handiwork had been removed; but this, he discovered, was not true, for the bricked frame and the aperture (the opening through this frame into the recess) were still there. Originally, before the Occult Room was built, there had been a window in this part of the wall.

Hodgson wrote an account of the Occult Room and the Shrine in multifarious detail, but it all boils down to this: there was easy access between Madame Blavatsky's bedroom and the Shrine—hence the phenomena in connexion with it.



KEY

1 Thin wall substituted for original window.

2 Hole in wall behind the middle panel of Shrine.

3 Four-panelled boarding originally at back of recess immediately behind Shrine.

4 Bricked frame forming front of recess.

5 Aperture formed by removing bricks from. one partition of the bricked frame.

6 Door of sideboard.

7 Hinged panel at back of sideboard.

8 Cupboard with secret double back opening into passage.

MADAME BLAVATSKY'S SITTING ROOM
3
CURTAIN
MADAME BLAVATSKY'S BEDROOM
CURTAIN
BUFFET
6
7
4
5
1
2
1
SHRINE
RECESS
CURTAIN
CURTAIN
OCCULT ROOM
8
BABULA'S ROOM
PASSAGE
DAMODAR'S ROOM

In the course of his investigations Hodgson met Hurrychund Chintamon, the President of the Bombay Arya Samaj, who had presented H.P.B. and the Colonel with his bill for receiving and entertaining them when they first arrived in India. Hurrychund showed Hodgson a letter which H.P.B. had sent him from America when she was making the link between the Theosophical Society and the Arya Samaj. It contained a rather unguarded reference to the Colonel: she called him a "psychologized baby" and added lightly that the Yankees thought themselves very smart, and the Colonel thought himself particularly smart, even for a Yankee, but he would have to get up much earlier in the morning to be as smart as she was. Hodgson, who was lent this letter, was cruel enough to show it to the Colonel.

Theosophists ignore as well as they can the seamy side of their movement: they cannot put a lid on the Coulombs, but they nicely refrain from mentioning any points of conflict, especially of a personal nature, between the Founders. Not so the Colonel. Of this incident and Hodgson, he says simply: "He made me suffer intensely in mind for a couple of days by declaring that Hurrychund Chintamon, of Bombay, had shown him a letter of H.P.B.'s to him, from New York, in which she said I was so under her hypnotic spell that she could make me believe what she liked by just looking me in the face." This was the darkest day in the Colonel's life and, he confesses, he was near going down to the beach to drown himself, but he clambered out of the abyss of despair by realizing that this was only H.P.B. *in her physical self*, and that such treachery, merely to gratify her vanity, was just one of her traits, which made it so very hard for anybody to live and work with her for long.

* * *

The thin-legged, lantern-jawed Damodar had done his best to preserve the honour of the Society, but had failed to stand up to the merciless interrogation of Richard Hodgson. He had given his fortune to the Cause, quarrelled with his family, and now he was spitting blood and everything was crumbling into ruins about him. . . . On 25 February, 1885, he left Madras without telling anyone, and went by train to Darjeeling; then on foot into Sikkim. Somewhere in Sikkim, he sent back his coolies and proceeded alone, and without food, into the Himalayan wastes. He had answered the call of the Masters and was off to their sacred abode. According to the official version, he arrived safely at the Brothers' *ashram* (religious centre) at Shigatze, where H.P.B. had stayed a while, but according to another version, the poor, consumptive lad collapsed on the way, and nothing more would have been heard of him, had not his frozen body been found by the roadside. The story with the unhappy ending was answered by the Colonel: "A maya [phantasm] of his body *may* have been left there to make it appear as if the pilgrim had succumbed; but that he reached his destination safely, and has ever since been under the protection of his Guru [teacher], I have reason to believe."

* * *

The Rev. George Patterson and Madame Coulomb had accused Madame Blavatsky of forgery and fraud, and of building up a society "on the credit obtained by a gigantic falsehood". Having done that, they sat back and calmly waited for her to sue them for libel. When, to their disappointment, they learnt that she was going to do nothing of the sort, they decided to take to the field again. They could not sue Madame Blavatsky for libel—she had not libelled anyone—but they could sue General Morgan for calling Madame Coulomb a liar and a thief. Accordingly, a firm of solicitors, Messrs. Barclay & Morgan, wrote to the General on 25 March, and demanded an apology on or before 2 April, failing which they would begin legal proceedings.

Alarm at this news spread in the theosophists' camp. A case against General Morgan would bring Madame Blavatsky, with her unguarded tongue and explosive temper, into the witness-box. Let them sue General Morgan, if they would, but H.P.B. must be got away at all costs.

The Colonel wrote in his diary for 28 March: "A day of disagreeable experiences. H.P.B. wild and violent; news of a further step in the plot of the missionaries against us." In his *Old Diary Leaves* he describes the scene with more detail: "All this excitement told almost fatally upon my dear Chum's health. It was awful to see her, with her face empurpled by the blood that rushed to her head, her eyes almost standing out from their orbits and dead-looking, as she tramped up and down the floor, denouncing everybody and saying wild things." Her physicians solemnly advised that, if her life was to be saved, she should be sent to Europe as quickly as possible.

On 31 March the General wrote to Messrs. Barclay & Morgan, solicitors, and told them that he refused to apologize to Madame Coulomb; and on the same day, Madame Blavatsky, held fast in an invalid chair, was hoisted aboard S.S. *Tibre*. She had with her Dr. Hartmann, a Miss Mary Flynn, daughter of a government official, and a little Indian called Babajee. According to a hostile report, she travelled under an assumed name. Mary Flynn had joined the Society in 1882, before the Founders moved house from Bombay to Madras.

When the news of H.P.B.'s hurried departure reached the missionaries, they advised Madame Coulomb to drop her case against General Morgan. "Your chief witness, Madame Blavatsky, has bolted; without her, General Morgan could not prove his case, and the verdict must be given in your favour. . . . Nobody wants to fine General Morgan."

Thus Madame Blavatsky left India, land of the Mahatmas, after laying the foundation of her fame: she was never to return.

Chapter Twenty-five

IN EXILE

THE weather was cold and the *pension* poorly furnished: in Madame Blavatsky's room there was only a rickety old table on which to write her articles about the magic of India for *Russkiy Vestnik*, and letters of complaint to the Colonel; and there was no carpet for her feet. She had booked for three months. She hadn't gone to a better *pension* because she couldn't afford a better *pension*; she was, for the first time in ten years, in financial difficulties.

To use a phrase of Aleister Crowley's, she was on "a magical retirement", a G.M.R., a Great Magical Retirement. The place of retirement was Torre del Greco on the north side of Vesuvius. S.S. *Tibre* had docked at Naples, she had disembarked and led her little party of theosophists straight there: the red-faced girl, the tiny Indian man (who slept at the foot of her bed), and the doctor with the tea-pot profile.

She wrote to Solov'yov, told him that she had returned to Europe because of her health, and that Hodgson was saying she was a Russian spy. He had said, and more than once, that that was her real reason for coming to India, the secret motive, as it were, behind her Theosophical Society, but what she could spy out, or on, which would be of any use to the Russians, he did not, and could not, say. H.P.B. begged Solov'yov not to give her address to anyone, except Madame de Morsier, the Secretary to the Paris branch of "the Theosophical Society of East and West", and invited him to come to Torre del Greco where, she said, the view was splendid and the air wonderful and the *pension* cheaper than stewed turnip.

Her next letter to Solov'yov was full of complaints about the weather and abuse of Dr. Hartmann, who had by now left Torre del Greco. "This dreadful man has done me more harm by his defence, and frequently by his deceit, than the Coulombs by their downright lying. . . . He is a cynic, a liar, cunning and vindictive, and his jealousy of the Master and his envy of anyone on whom the Master bestows the smallest attention are simply repulsive." And so on and so forth.

Solov'yov replied and told her that he was soon making a trip to Switzerland, and he hoped that they would be able to meet there.

The story of Babajee (the tiny Indian man) was unusual. Begrimed and ragged, he had turned up one day at Adyar and with a woeful expression in his beady eyes had made his way into H.P.B.'s presence, flung himself at her feet, and begged her to save him. It appeared that he had fled from his Guru in the forest, the rigours of Hatha yoga being too much for him. Kind-hearted H.P.B. calmed and comforted him, fed and clothed him, and in return he became her devoted slave. When he heard she was off to Europe, he fell on his knees and begged her to take him with her.

After three months in Torre del Greco, H.P.B. decided to end her magical retirement. An unknown admirer, one on whom she had probably cast her large azure eyes, had sent her a sum of money. Gathering her two followers about her, she left for Rome.

Meanwhile Solov'yov had arrived in Switzerland and was staying, with Madame de Morsier for company, in the mountain hamlet of St. Cergues, near Geneva. Down below was the lake, like a pond of blue.

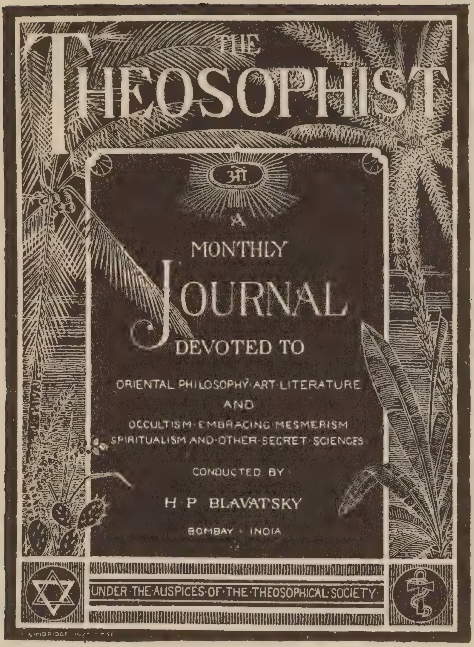
In August, H.P.B. arrived. She was on the way to Germany and had made a slight detour. Solov'yov's sharp pen described the memorable scene: what delight this accomplished writer must have taken in observing it!

> "Suddenly there sprang out of the stage-coach a strange creature, something between a big monkey and a little fidgety devil [Babajee]. Its leanness was striking. A poor half-European

> kind of dress dangled on it, as though under it, apart from bones, there was nothing. A face the size of a little fist, of a dark, dark brown colour and without sign of hair. On his head there was a thick cap of long black winding hairs; huge eyes, also completely black of course, with a terrified and suspicious expression. The black man was saying something in English with a piping but at the same time hoarse voice. After him was emerging a stout, large, clumsy young person, with an ugly, red, bewildered and completely stupid face [Mary Flynn]. The public with open mouths were looking at the little devil, but the most interesting item was yet to come. The little devil and the clumsy young woman, and then I and Madame de Morsier, began with great difficulty to extricate from the coach something inside. This something was 'Madame' herself, all swollen, tired out with travelling, grumbling, with a huge, dark-grey face, and popping eyes, like two round, faded turquoises. On her head was a very high, grey felt fireman's helmet with ventilators and a veil. Her globular figure seemed even more globular because of the incredible sort of sacque which was draped about her."

After eight days at St. Cergues, H.P.B. and Babajee proceeded to Würzburg, in Bavaria. Mary Flynn was not with them; she had been packed off to her uncle in England. Solov'yov found this young Irish girl extraordinary. In tones of amazement he tells us that, although she could hardly speak one word of French, she set off to the local fair and sang and danced with the rest with great animation—as if a knowledge of French was necessary to do that. His other criticism of her was that she saw the Master almost daily, but it is not clear if he is describing her naïvety or the guile of her mistress—perhaps both. According to him, H.P.B. did her best to persuade him to become a more devoted theosophist—he was already a member of the Society—and drop his distrustful, doubting attitude. As an inducement, she promised to unveil to him the secrets of occultism which Dr. Hartmann had begged her for in vain.

H.P.B. took lodgings for herself and her little Indian companion in Ludwigstrasse which Solov'yov, who was never far



THE THEOSOPHIST

A MONTHLY JOURNAL DEVOTED TO

ORIENTAL PHILOSOPHY · ART · LITERATURE

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SPIRITUALISM AND · OTHER · SECRET · SCIENCES

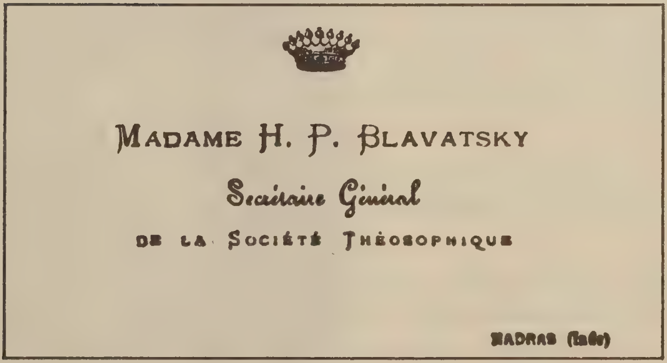
CONDUCTED BY

H · P BLAVATSKY

BOMBAY · INDIA

UNDER · THE · AUSPICES · OF · THE · THEOSOPHICAL · SOCIETY

Original cover of the *Theosophist*, 1879



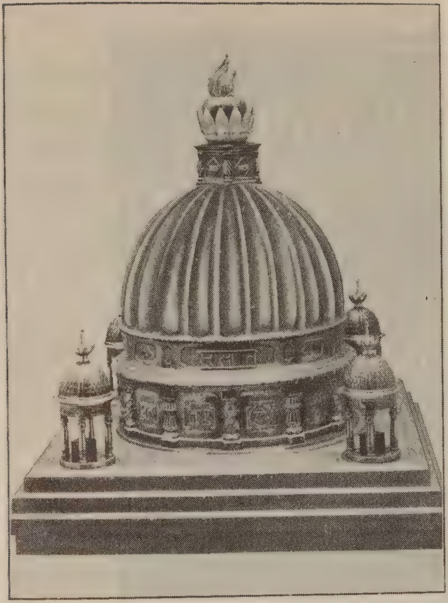
MADAME H. P. BLAVATSKY

Secrétaire Général

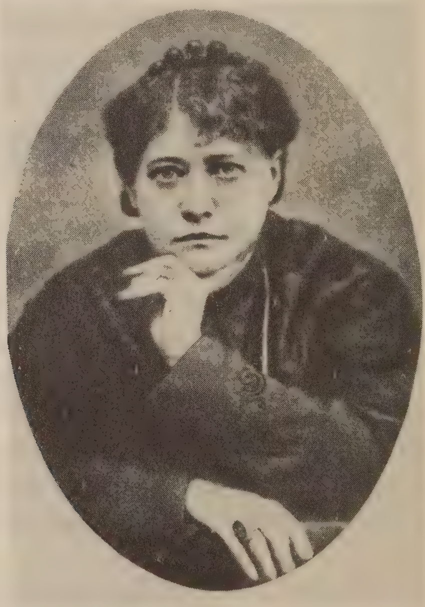
DE LA SOCIÉTÉ THÉOSOPHIQUE

MADRAS (Inde)

The visiting card used by H. P. B. in Europe in 1884. In spite of her American citizenship, the card featured a coronet.



The urn containing Madame Blavatsky's ashes.
It was made by Sven Bengtsson.



An early portrait of H. P. B.

from her heels, called the best street in Würzburg. Her rooms at number 6, he tells us, were incomparably better than those in Paris.

Solov'yov was still in search of the truth about her, and still fascinated by her remarkable, unique personality. The time had come, he said, for him to begin his investigations of her in earnest. He settled himself into Ruegmer's Hotel, not far from Ludwigstrasse.

He found his famous compatriot all swollen up with dropsy, hardly able to crawl out of bed, but in spite of this the sheets of writing were swiftly flying off the end of her pen. The local doctor, whom he went to see on her behalf, confessed he had never known anything like it, said she had several mortal diseases, any one of which would have killed an ordinary person long before, but her nature was phenomenal. Since she had been able to carry on for so long in this condition, he saw no reason why she shouldn't carry on longer. "A wonderful phenomenon!" he exclaimed.

Solov'yov saw her daily and every time, he tells us, she produced some trifling phenomenon to please him:—

Astral bells had sounded—mysterious, clear, high up, and then, suddenly, something dropped on to the floor. Solov'yov hurriedly bent down to pick it up and found in his hands a pretty little silver thing, of fine work and strange form—the magic bell!

H.P.B.'s expression fell, and she snatched it from him.

Solov'yov cleared his throat significantly, smiled, and began talking of something else.

On another occasion at Würzburg he opened a drawer to get out a photograph for her, and his eye fell on a heap of unused envelopes, the very envelopes in which epistles from the Brothers hurtled down from the ceiling or mysteriously appeared in unexpected places. He warned her to be more careful. Her face, he said, grew perfectly black, she tried in vain to speak, but her whole body could only writhe helplessly in her huge chair.

This incident led to a frank discussion, during which H.P.B. is alleged to have made this remarkable confession.

"What is one to do when, in order to rule men, you must deceive them, when, in order to catch them and make them pursue whatever it may be, it is necessary to promise and show them toys? Suppose my books and *The Theosophist* were a thousand times more interesting and serious, do you think that I would have anywhere to live and any degree of success, unless behind all this there stood 'phenomena'? I should have achieved absolutely nothing, and would long ago have pegged out from hunger. They would have crushed me, and no one would have begun to consider that I, too, am a living creature, that I, too, must eat and drink. But long, long ago I understood these dear people whose stupidity gives me at times enormous satisfaction. . . . If you only knew what lions and eagles in all the countries of the world have turned themselves into asses at my whistling and obediently clapped me in time with their huge ears."

These terrible sentiments, so cynical in their appraisal of human beings and so ruthless in their aim, sound like the confessions of a politician. But to what extent can one believe Vsevolod Solov'yov? There is only his word for it.

In the autumn of 1885 the Countess Wachtmeister left her home in Sweden with the intention of going to Italy and spending the winter there. Before she set off a voice spoke to her, told her to take a certain occult book with her. The Countess was not surprised to hear this voice, for she was clairaudient. It so happened that she altered her plan and went to Würzburg, where she found the great occultist busy at her masterpiece *The Secret Doctrine*, and needing the very book which she had brought with her.

H.P.B. would get up at six a.m. and work an hour or so before breakfast at eight. After breakfast, she would return to her desk and work till lunch-time. The Countess would summon her to the dining-room by ringing a little handbell. Frequently H.P.B. would go on working and ignore lunch. At seven she stopped work and spent the rest of the day playing patience. At nine she went to bed with the Russian newspapers under her arm. At what hour she fell asleep is uncertain, as this incident shows.

The Countess shared the same room with her, a screen dividing them. One night the Countess found herself unable to sleep; she heard one o'clock strike. Madame Blavatsky, to judge by the sound of her breathing, was asleep—but her lamp was still on. The Countess got out of bed and went behind the screen. She turned the lamp out and was going back to bed when the lamp flared up. Again she turned it down, and this time waited until every vestige of the flame was extinguished. But, lo and behold! the flame shot up again and in a moment the lamp was burning as brightly as ever. For the third time she turned the flame down, but it flared up yet again. This time, however, she saw "a brown hand slowly and gently turning the knob of the lamp".

The Countess realized that this was the hand of a *chela* [pupil] who was attendant upon H.P.B.; in other words, Babajee, although she does not say so. In spite of this realization, she was unnerved, and called out, "Madame Blavatsky!" There was no response from the sleeping figure in the bed. She called again, louder this time. Still no response. So she called yet again and louder still.

"Oh, my heart! My heart! Countess, you nearly killed me. . . . My heart, my heart!"

After the Countess had given her a dose of digitalis, H.P.B. explained that she had been "with Master". In other words, her astral form had been out of her body.

On 31 December, 1885, the Society for Psychical Research published its Report in two hundred pages of five hundred words a page—a substantial work on phenomena, in fact. Theosophists had been waiting for it with grave misgivings, for in April the *Journal* of the Society for Psychical Research had, in a note about the return of Hodgson from India, baldly stated that the evidence now pointed to the conclusion that the marvels were all due to fraud. The Report begins with the

Conclusions of the Committee—that all the Marvellous Phenomena were to be explained as due either to Madame Blavatsky's deliberate deception, or illusions and hallucinations on the part of witnesses. Madame Blavatsky could have thrown the Report into the fire and turned a defiant back on such a stupid and superficial Report, but its summary of herself did not, in its perverse way, underestimate her stature. "For our own part," wrote Richard Hodgson, "we regard her neither as the mouthpiece of hidden seers, nor as a mere vulgar adventuress; we think that she has achieved a title to permanent remembrance as one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting impostors of history."* As for the Colonel, the Committee dismissed him as a fool of extraordinary credulity, and expressed their desire "to disclaim any intention of imputing wilful deception to that gentleman".

The Countess was the first to see H.P.B. after the Report had been put into her hands. "I shall never forget that day nor the look of blank and stony despair that she cast on me when I entered her sitting-room and found her with the book open in her hands."

"This," she cried, "is the Karma of the Theosophical Society and it falls upon me. I am the scapegoat. I am made to bear all the sins of the Society, and now that I am dubbed the greatest impostor of the age, and a Russian spy into the bargain, who will listen to me or read *The Secret Doctrine*? How can I carry on Master's work? O cursed phenomena, which I only produced to please private friends and instruct those around me. What an awful Karma to bear! How shall I live through it? If I die Master's work will be wasted, and the Society will be ruined!"

Her rage was, as usual, beyond description. "Why don't you go? Why don't you leave me?" she stormed. "You are a Countess, you cannot stop here with a ruined woman, with one held up to scorn before the whole world, one who will be pointed at everywhere as a trickster and an impostor. Go before you are defiled by my shame."

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*In a letter to Moncure Conway, Madame Coulomb summed up Madame Blavatsky in a more homely fashion: "I don't think that ever since the world began there has been an impostor like Madame Blavatsky."

In the next few days came a flood of resignations from the Theosophical Society.

The question is: Is the Report fair? Theosophists say no, blame Hodgson's inexperience. Alvin Boyd Kuhn, most serious of theosophical critics, has this to say of Richard Hodgson and his Report: "He had not witnessed any phenomena nor examined any. He questioned witnesses to several of the wonders a full year after the latter had taken place. He rendered an *ex parte* judgment in that he acted as judge, accuser and jury and gave no hearing to the defence. He ignored a mass of testimony of the witnesses to the phenomena, and accepted the words of the Coulombs, whose conduct had already put them under suspicion."

The Report seems to have upset the devoted Babajee too. He was one of the primary witnesses and he is summarily dismissed as a liar. Whether he was upset by the Report or was infected by his mistress's upset, he grew exceedingly miserable. Perhaps it was just a longing for the warm skies of India. The Countess said he was jealous of the success Mohini was having in London with his lectures on the Ancient Wisdom. On the Countess's recommendation he was packed off to Frau Gebhard, and from Elberfeld this tiny Indian, to everyone's amazement, began to bombard Madame Blavatsky with insulting letters. The Countess herself received from him a letter which she described as the letter of a madman: in it, he begged her to come at once to save him from "the Dweller of the Threshold", who is a figure like Cerberus, the Demon of the Pit. She left immediately for Elberfeld, wondering about lunatic asylums, and on arrival greeted Frau Gebhard with the words, "Is he raving? Is he violent?"

"Oh, he's all right," replied Frau Gebhard.

The Countess went upstairs to see him.

After a while, it seemed to Frau Gebhard, who was in the drawing-room below, and who could hear the sounds of furniture being smashed, that the chandelier would drop off the ceiling.

"He was no better than a wild beast," said the Countess, "with the most fiendish look of hatred in his face, and he finished by foaming at the mouth . . . the upshot of all this row was his intense hatred of Mme. Blavatsky. He said he would draw her life's blood out of her, he would kick her out of the Society, that he would tear her to pieces, that he would write articles against her, which he would send to the public papers in London, that he would destroy the Theosophical Society and would form out of its remnants a Society for himself where he would preach only ethics."

He also said that he wished H.P.B. would go back to Russia and throw *The Secret Doctrine* to the dogs.

Chapter Twenty-six

THE CIRCUS RIDER

THE First Report of the "psychists", and the doleful rumour of their second, and final, report, were making Madame Blavatsky think that she ought to lower the veil a little and tell the world who she really was: it would be a kind of defence. Sinnett had been urging her for a long time to write her memoirs, or to let him write them for her. She finally agreed, and after a great tug-of-war between them for facts, facts and still more facts about her early life, Sinnett's *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky* was published during 1886.

It is, I suppose, one of the worst biographies ever written. There are two reasons for this. One, Alfred Sinnett couldn't write biographies—he hadn't the touch—and, two, H.P.B. won the tug-of-war and kept most of the facts to herself.

(In two confidential letters which she wrote to him while he was struggling to piece the fragments together, she blurts out some highly interesting facts about herself and a singer called Metrovitch, and a baron called Meyendorf, to both of whom, rumour had it, she had been mistress, and to one of whom, the baron, she had born a hunchbacked, ailing, unhappy child, notwithstanding Dr. Oppenheim's certificate proving that she could not have given birth to a weazel—her own expression—let alone a hunchback.)

From Sinnett's official biography we learn that she was born in the Ukrainian town of Yekaterinoslav on the night of 30 July, 1831 (in the new style, 11 August). As one would expect with so remarkable a person, the occasion was attended by an unusual event or two—a cholera epidemic, and a conflagration at her baptism. She was thus ushered in the world "amid coffins and desolation".

Her father was Colonel Peter Hahn, and her mother, Helena Fadeyev, who wrote romantic novels under the name of Zenaida R., and who was called by the great critic, Belinsky, the George Sand of Russia. She wrote a dozen novels, bore two daughters and a son, and died at the age of twenty-seven. The Hahns were a noble German family, originally from Mecklenberg, who had long settled in Russia. H.P.B.'s grandfather on her father's side was one General Alexis Hahn von Rottenstern Hahn. The parents of her mother were Privy Councillor Andrey Fadeyev and Princess Helena Dolgorouky, distinguished botanist and woman of wide culture who corresponded with British scientists—a rare distinction for a Russian woman of those times. The Dolgoroukys traced their descent right back to Russia's founder, Rurik.

Like Bulwer Lytton, author of the occult novel *Zanoni*, she was born under the rising sign of Cancer. Cancerians are ruled by the Moon, that is to say by their emotions. It is not, therefore, surprising that Helena Petrovna rebelled against authority, showed tantrums at every turn, walked in her sleep. She was, in fact, a hysteric, and all the stories of her wonderful childhood have a strong hysterical element in them. Her mother on her death-bed is reputed to have said of her twelve-year-old daughter, "Ah, well, perhaps it's all for the best. I shall at least be spared knowing what befalls Helena. Of one thing I am certain, her life won't be like other women's; she will have a lot to suffer."

At a very early age she was drawn to the weird and the fantastic. Her sister, Vera, said that she was frightened of the figments of her own fancy, would see eyes glaring at her from dark corners and the most inoffensive pieces of furniture, and run screaming for help.* In her grandparents' ancient mansion†

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*Vera Zhelikhovsky, *Mémoires d'une Petite Fille Russe*, 1896.

†According to the *Reminiscences of Prince A. I. Baryatinsky* (by General P. S. Nikolayev) which appeared in the historical review *Istoreecheskiy Vestnik*, December, 1885, the Fadeyev mansion was built round a great hall hung with family portraits; in the drawing-room were Gobelin tapestries—a present from the Empress Catherine to Prince Chavchavadze, the original owner of the mansion.

at Saratov on the Volga, where she went to live after her mother's death, she would hide away in the underground dungeons, brooding on tales of serfs who had been flogged to death there. She received no regular education, went to no university, and then she was married to General Blavatsky. A taunt from her exasperated governess—that no man, not even "plumeless raven" Blavatsky, would marry her: it was she who had described General Blavatsky as a plumeless raven—was the direct cause, we are told, of her marriage. She flushed deeply at hearing the priest say, as she stood with this General Blavatsky before the altar: "Thou shalt honour and obey thy husband."

Thus, out of bravado, pride and ill-temper, she married Nikifor [Nicephorus] Blavatsky, Vice-Governor of the province of Erivan in Transcaucasia, a man whom she described at the time as "nearer seventy than sixty", but who was, in fact, no more than forty, and who actually outlived her. The day after her marriage, which was on 7 July, 1848 (three weeks before her seventeenth birthday), she attempted to run away to the Persian border, but was frustrated by the Cossack guard. For three months she lived with Nikifor, and then she left him for good. What happened between that time and 1873, when she arrived in America, is a little vague. According to her own account, she spent several years in Tibet, studying the ancient sacerdotal language called Senzar, and in other remote lands, acquiring her occult knowledge. Her biographer was dissatisfied; he particularly begged her to tell him about the "Metrovitch incident".

"Now, why should I bring out Metrovitch?" she replied. "Suppose I said the *whole* truth about him? Well, I knew the man in 1850, over whose apparently dead corpse I stumbled in Pera, at Constantinople, as I was returning home one night from Bougakdira to Missire's hotel. He had received three good stabs in his back from one or two, or more, Maltese ruffians, and a Corsican, who were paid for it by the Jesuits. I had him picked up, after standing over his still-breathing corpse for about four hours, before my guide could get *mouches* to pick him up. The only Turkish policeman meanwhile who chanced to come up, asking for *baksheesh* and offering to roll the supposed corpse into a neighbouring ditch, then showed a decided attraction to my own rings and bolting only when he saw my revolver pointing at him. Remember it was in 1850, and in Turkey.

"Then I had the man carried to a Greek hotel over the way, where he was recognized and sufficiently taken care of, to come back to life. On the next day he asked me to write to his wife. . . . I lost sight of them after that for several years and met him again at Florence, where he was singing at the Pergola, *with his wife*. He was a *Carbonaro*, a revolutionist of the worst kind, a fanatical rebel, a Hungarian, from *Metrovitz*, the name of which town he took as a *nom de guerre*. He was the natural son of the Duke of Lucea, who brought him up. He hated the priests, fought in all the rebellions, and escaped hanging by the Austrians, only because—well, it's something I need not be talking about. Then I found him again in Tiflis in 1861, again with his wife, who died after I had left in 1865; then my relatives knew him well and he was friends with my cousin Witte."

Into this carelessly-written account of one Metrovitch, a singer, there comes a child, but whose child it was is not clear. The father was either Metrovitch or Baron Nicholas Meyendorf, keen spiritualist and close friend of the famous Daniel Dunglas Home. And the mother, according to Bechhofer Roberts, was H.P.B., or so he was told by the baron's sister-in-law, Baroness Meyendorf, who also said that photographs of H.P.B. and her hunchback son were preserved in the Meyendorfs' home in Estonia. H.P.B. took the child with her to Italy and there it died.

She was quite firm with Sinnett, told him plainly that there was a veil drawn over her life before the year 1875 when she appeared as a public character. "It was my private life, holy and sacred to all but the slanderous and venomous mad-dogs who poke their noses under cover of night into every family's and every individual's private life. To those hyenas who will unearth every tomb by night, to get at the corpses and devour them, I owe no explanations. If I am prevented by circumstances from killing them, I have to suffer, but no one can expect me to stand on Trafalgar Square and to be taking into my confidence all the city roughs and cabmen that pass. And even these have more my respect and confidence than your reading and literary public, your 'drawing-room' and Parliament ladies and gentlemen. I would rather trust an honest, half-drunk cabman than I would the former."

In another letter she tells Sinnett that the baron had confessed to Solov'yov that he had been very much in love with her, and had insisted that she divorce Blavatsky and marry him, but it was a good thing she didn't (said the baron) "because he found out later what an infamous, LOOSE woman I was, and that the child was HIS AND MINE!!!" H.P.B. was, of course, only reporting what Solov'yov had said, and the three exclamation marks are the measure of her amazement at Solov'yov's, or the baron's, lies.

Two years before these letters were published—to the annoyance, it is said, of Annie Besant, who was then the head of the Theosophical Society—another ray of light was unexpectedly shed on Madame Blavatsky's past. Count Serge Julievitch Witte, the famous Russian statesman, published his memoirs,* and in them he mentions some surprising things about Madame Blavatsky, whose cousin he happened to be. Witte begins his autobiography by saying that he was born in Tiflis in 1849, and that his grandmother on his mother's side was Princess Dolgorouky. This leads him to his aunt who wrote novels, Zenaida R., and to her daughter, Madame Blavatsky, the celebrated theosophist. Count Witte was engaged in Russian politics and world affairs. He was not a theosophist; he was not an enemy of theosophy; he was not interested in occultism; he just happened to be a cousin of

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*The *Memoirs of Count Witte*, 1921.

Madame Blavatsky: he had met her, and had remembered a number of stories and rumours about her which, at the time, had been a subject of discussion among the whole family. The source is unimpeachable.

He tells us, first, of her marriage to "a certain Blavatsky, Vice-Governor of the province of Erivan", and the fact that she very soon abandoned him, and returned to her grandparents, who were his grandparents, too, at Saratov. Next, he tells us that his grandfather, Fadeyev, decided to send "the troublesome young person" to her father, Colonel Hahn, at St. Petersburg. In those days there was no railway linking the two cities, so she had to make her way, accompanied by four servants, by sea to a port which was connected by rail to St. Petersburg. In a capacious four-in-hand she was escorted to Poti, where several steamers were at anchor. Miss Hahn and the servants, who included grandfather Fadeyev's steward, went aboard the *Commodore*, an English vessel with whose captain the seventeen-year-old Miss Hahn had, in the words of Count Witte, "struck up an acquaintance". When the ship put in at Kerch, she sent the servants ashore to find an inn and prepare for her landing the following morning, but during the night she sailed away with the captain to Constantinople.

According to her official biographer, Sinnett, who mentions her escape on the *Commodore*, she had the good fortune to meet at Constantinople a certain Countess K., with whom she travelled to Greece and Egypt, but Witte only says that at Constantinople she joined a circus "as an equestrienne". There is nothing about her riding horses in a Turkish circus in *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*. This was one of the incidents, apparently, which she kept to herself—at least as far as Sinnett was concerned. She had ridden across the Steppes while with her father's regiment, and there is nothing improbable about it. Yet the thought of Madame Blavatsky, the future author of *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, flying round and round the circus ring . . . is enchanting!

One member of the audience at least had a special regard for her. He returned again and again to the circus. He had fallen in love with her moon-like face and large azure eyes. She was not like other circus riders he knew; there was something different about her. He was introduced to her, gazed into her marvellous eyes and confessed his love. H.P.B. gave up the circus, and accompanied him to one of Europe's capitals.

We do not know which capital it was, for Witte does not tell us, even if he knew. He does tell us, though, that H.P.B.'s lover affected family feelings, that he wrote to grandfather Fadeyev, introduced himself as the celebrated Hungarian bass singer Agardi Metrovitch, and said that he and Helena were married. He signed himself, appropriately enough, "Grandson".

Two or three years later, grandfather Fadeyev, Director of the Department of State Lands in the Caucasus, and one-time Governor of the province of Saratov,* received a letter, bearing an American stamp, from another grandson, an Englishman this time. He also affected the nicety of family feelings, said he'd married Helena, and that she had accompanied him on a business trip to America. This ties up with official biographer Sinnett's account. He tells us that she went in the summer of 1851 to America (also Canada and Mexico) where she witnessed voodoo rites among the Negroes of New Orleans.

Next, says Witte, cousin Helena reappeared in Europe; she was now "the right-hand man" of Home, Sorcerer of Kings, as he has been called by Eric John Dingwall. "Right-hand man" is a handy phrase, but it is an exaggeration. All Madame Blavatsky herself says of Daniel Dunglas Home is that she met him in Paris in 1858, and that he converted her to spiritualism. But to what extent, if at all, she worked with him we do not know. The previous year, 1857, Home had extended his fame by producing phantoms before Napoleon III and the Empress Eugénie. Home's wife does not mention Madame

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***Theosophia*, May-June, 1947.

Blavatsky in her detailed biography of her husband, which is a great pity and a loss to the historian of the occult. The collaboration of the young Madame Blavatsky and D. D. Home, who was the greatest enigma of the nineteenth century, would make a fascinating chapter in the history of magic.

From the newspapers, her father, grandfather, cousin Witte and everyone else in the family circle learnt that she was giving piano lessons in London, and in Paris, and, later, that she was the manager of the royal choir of King Milan of Serbia. According to the Colonel, she had been taught the piano by the famous Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870), but he—the Colonel—rarely heard her play. Moscheles also taught Ruskin's cousin, Mary, that "sound, plain, musician".

After she had been away from home for ten years, she wrote to grandfather, who had given up the old castle at Saratov and was now at Tiflis, to ask if she could return. She promised, said Witte, to mend her ways, and even to go back to her husband, General Blavatsky, if he would have her. Grandfather said yes, and thus, in 1858, H.P.B. returned to Russia, and met cousin Witte, aged nine, who was amazed by the beauty of her large azure eyes.

Her return to Russia in 1858 is confirmed by Sinnett, who was supplied with information for this period by her sister Vera Zhelikhovsky. In Tiflis she called down spirits for the guests who came to the house. "This apparently unattractive woman," writes Witte, "turned the heads of a great many society people in Tiflis. She did it by spiritualist séances which she conducted at our house. . . ." Raps were heard, spirits were evoked, and a closed piano—not a pianola—played. Peace was established between her and her husband, and she returned to him. But she did not stay with General Blavatsky for long. One day she was accosted in the street by Metrovitch: he was singing in the Italian opera at Tiflis. When his engagement there was at an end he vanished, taking Madame Blavatsky, the wife of General Blavatsky, with him.

The couple reappeared in Kiev, where he had an engagement to sing Russian operas, *A Life for the Tzar*, *Russalka*, and so on. A scandal, which involved the Governor-General of Kiev, one Prince Dundukov-Korsakov, who had known H.P.B. in her maiden days, made her and Metrovitch hurriedly depart. They turned up in Odessa, and there H.P.B. opened an ink factory. The ink factory failed, and she started an artificial-flower shop. Meanwhile grandfather Fadeyev died and the family moved to Odessa. Witte visited cousin Helena on several occasions in the artificial-flower shop and got to know her well. Her sister, Vera, confirms the story about the flower shop, only she calls it an artificial-flower factory.

Finally, a journey to Cairo. Metrovitch, now "a toothless lion", accepted an engagement to sing in the Italian opera there; and to Cairo they set off, but the ship was wrecked and Metrovitch was drowned. "Madame Blavatsky," wrote Witte, "entered Cairo in a wet skirt and without a penny to her name." The year was 1871. Witte concludes his account of his cousin with the statement that she afterwards established the Theosophical Society. The story of the shipwreck, with horrifying detail, was told by H.P.B. herself to a reporter of the New York *Graphic*.

This chronicle of H.P.B.'s early life leaves out her first visit, during 1850-1, to Cairo where she met Albert Leighton Rawson. The American artist does not say anything about Metrovitch: it seems, therefore, that she had parted (for the time being) from the celebrated singer whom she called her "most faithful devoted friend".

She was nineteen years old, and in search of occult knowledge. She dressed, like Rawson, as an Arab, and together they called on the Chief of the Serpent Charmers, Shayk Yusuf ben Makerzi, and took lessons in the dangerous art of handling live snakes.

In Cairo at this time, staying at Shepheard's Hotel, was a certain Countess Kazenov. The young Russian widow—as H.P.B. gave herself out to be—was able to tell the Countess that she had solved at least one of the mysteries of Egypt, and to prove it by pulling out of the folds of her Arab dress a writhing snake.

She and Rawson also visited the celebrated Copt magician, Paulos Metamon.

H.P.B.: "We are students who have heard of your great learning and skill in magic and wish to learn at your feet."

P.M.: "I perceive that you are two Franks in disguise and I have no doubt you are in search of knowledge—of occult and magical lore. I look for the coin."

Said H.P.B. to Rawson a quarter of a century later: "There was the key to the occult mysteries of Old Cairo! The Chief—the Shayk of the magicians—had discovered the secret of the philosopher's stone that turned things into gold. He was enriched by us and we were enlightened."

Chapter Twenty-seven

THE SECRET DOCTRINE

MADAME BLAVATSKY had a Swiss cuckoo-clock in the shape of a chalet. The Countess Wachtmeister said it was a distraction for her. It was certainly a distraction for the Countess; H.P.B. had her patience-playing for distraction. The clock was either out of order or the cuckoo was bewitched. Sometimes, says the Countess, it would sigh and groan and strike like a gong. Louise, the maid, was greatly afraid of it. One evening the Countess saw what she thought were streams of light coming from it.

"Oh, it's only the spiritual telegraph," said H.P.B. "They are laying it on stronger tonight on account of tomorrow's work."

The work was the writing of *The Secret Doctrine*. As Madame Blavatsky said to the poet Yeats, "I write, write, write as the Wandering Jew walks, walks, walks." She pressed on with this, her most ambitious, work, to finish it before death overtook her. The pile of written sheets grew steadily higher.

Her original intention was to rewrite *Isis Unveiled* and to make three, if not four, volumes out of the two, by the inclusion of additional matter. The learned Subba Row had made suggestions for its construction, or rather reconstruction, and she relied on him to help her with explanations of Sanskrit texts. Sinnett's offer to write a preface to the new work she declined somewhat brusquely. "I did not ask you to do it, but the Mahatmas and Mohini here, and Subba Row there, are quite sufficient for the task of helping me."

Mohini was the cause, towards the end of 1885, of an upset of an unexpected kind. In spite of his ascetic outlook and habits, and his aversion for women, he had become involved in Paris with a young Englishwoman called Miss Leonard.

"There is another thing, and this is absolutely *ghastly*," wrote H.P.B. from Würzburg to Mrs. Sinnett on 9 October, 1885. ". . . Oh, for the horror, the sickening disgusting horror of the whole thing. Speak of the *inner* Circle, of the *Oriental* Group! The 'Roman' group it ought to be called, with all those Messalines in it! . . . *My heart has changed into a pillar* of ice-cold marble. I wish I had never heard what I have: But know one thing: the Anglo-French Messalina [Miss Leonard] who, inveigling Mohini into the Barbyan wood, suddenly, and seeing that her overtures *in words* were left without effect—slipped down her loose garments to the waist, leaving her *nude* before the boy. . . .

"There *are others in the group*, and not one but *four in number*, who burn with a scandalous ferocious passion for Mohini—with that craving of old *gourmands* for *unnatural* food, for rotten Limburg cheese with worms in it to tickle their satiated palates—or of the 'Pall Mall' iniquitous old men for *forbidden fruit*—ten-year-old virgins! The golden-haired *amanuensis* of * * * went so far as to write *in a trance* an 'order' from some unknown great Adept 'Lorenzo', ordering Mohini in cunningly couched expressions to make of * * * his *alter ego*, his *own body* to do *with her body as he pleased*—but that such a union was *absolutely necessary* for the development of both, the *psychical* having to be helped by the *physiological* and *vice versa*."

Recklessly, H.P.B. wrote a long letter to Miss Leonard, the young woman who had exposed herself to the handsome Mohini, called her a Messalina, a woman of infamous vices, and said she was like Potiphar's wife. It is not difficult to imagine the state of Miss Leonard's feelings when she read this letter. She did not reply herself, but left it to her lawyer, who impolitely, not to say ruthlessly, addressed Madame Blavatsky as Madame Metrovitch, pointed out that Mr. Mohini had written Miss Leonard nearly a hundred letters in the last six months, and informed her that, on his client's behalf, he proposed to sue her for libel.

H.P.B. thought this threat ridiculous, but nevertheless she replied very soberly, offered to apologize if it were true that Mohini had written letters to Miss Leonard "couched in the most extraordinary terms", and she suggested sending someone round to see selected passages of these letters.

Miss Leonard was a member of the Theosophical Society—that was how she had met Mohini—and she also carried her troubles to the Society's president, Colonel Olcott. We know this from the letter he wrote to the Countess about her. "Miss Leonard has appealed to me for redress and I have sent her a quietening letter to suggest that she should allow me to arbitrate the case and keep it out of the courts. H.P.B. has unquestionably involved herself legally in this matter." But the subject was not kept out of the newspapers. Miss Leonard spoke to a reporter, told him of the Society's secret signs and other matters, and in March, 1886, *The Sunday Times* published an attack on the Society—"a most grossly foul and unjust attack" Mohini called it in a letter to Frederick Leigh Gardner, who was his go-between: the tender state of his relationship with Miss Leonard prevented his writing any more letters to her. The *World* also published an attack on the Theosophical Society over the scandal in connexion with the "Oriental Group".

The Countess Wachtmeister gathered that Miss Leonard would be satisfied if Madame Blavatsky wrote her an apology, and if Mohini returned to India.

The matter was finally settled out of court.

Mohini was the author of a paper "On the Higher Aspects of Theosophic Studies", which he read at an open meeting of the London Lodge on 10 December, 1884. H.P.B. ascribed his ruination to male and female adulation of him, incessant flattery, and his own weakness.

In the beginning of 1885, H.P.B. received astrally from the Master, Morya, a plan for the writing of *The Secret Doctrine*; it was to her entire satisfaction. As she wrote, the Countess Wachtmeister copied. The Countess also helped by verifying obscure passages in obscure books: on one occasion she asked a friend of hers who had a relative in the Vatican to ask him—the relative—to check a sentence in a manuscript in the Vatican Library. Usually the Astral Light, in which H.P.B. saw all the passages she required, was clear enough, but not always. As she said to the Countess: "I make what I can only describe as a sort of vacuum in the air before me and fix my sight and my will upon it, and soon scene after scene passes before me like the successive pictures of a diorama, or, if I need a reference or information from some book, I fix my mind intently, and the astral counterpart of the book appears, and from it I take what I need. The more perfectly my mind is free from distractions and mortifications, the more energy and intentness it possesses, the more easily I can do this; but today, after all the vexations I have undergone in consequence of the letter from ——, I could not concentrate properly, and each time I got the quotation all wrong."

The work went on slowly, and the pile of sheets rose steadily higher. *The Secret Doctrine* is an account of the root knowledge—if one may call it so—from which science, religion and philosophy are derived. It was known to the sages of old, but kept secret from the vulgar or, rather, given out to them piecemeal, as much as they could digest in different times. This root knowledge, or secret doctrine, is a commentary on *The Stanzas of Dzyan*, fragments of a sacred writing—in Dzyan—to which she had access when in the Forbidden Land beyond the Himalayas. (Dzyan is not Tibetan, but "a language unknown to philology".) This was her answer to Hodgson and the Society for Psychical Research, her vindication, a work which no impostor could write.

She wrote to the Colonel in India, said she was sending him the first three chapters for him to show to the learned Subba Row "for all points concerned with the Advaitism and the occultism of the old Aryan Religion". But Subba Row, whose faith in theosophy had been shaken, showed no keenness to see the manuscript.

To Sinnett on 3 March, 1886, she wrote, "I *live two lives again*. Master finds that it is too difficult for me to be looking consciously into the Astral Light for my *S.D.* and so, it is now about a fortnight, I am made to see all I have to as though in a dream. I see large and long rolls of paper on which things are written and I recollect them. Thus all the Patriarchs from Adam to Noah were given to me to see. I have finished an enormous Introductory Chapter, or *Preamble*, Prologue, call it what you will; just to show the reader that the text as it goes, every Section beginning with a page of translation from the *Book of Dzyan* and the Secret Book of 'Maytreya Buddha' *Champai chhos Nga* are no fiction. I was ordered to do so, to make a rapid sketch of what was known historically and in literature, in classics and in profane and sacred histories—during the 500 years that preceded the Christian period and the 500 years that followed it: of *magic*, the existence of a Universal Secret Doctrine known to the philosophers and Initiates of every country and even to several of the Church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and others, who had been initiated themselves. Also to describe the Mysteries and some rites; and I can assure you that most extraordinary things are given out now, the whole story of the Crucifixion on the *Lathe* of the Candidate—trials, going down to Hell, etc."

Again, in an undated letter from Würzburg: "I am very busy on *Secret D.* The thing at New York is repeated—only far clearer and better. I begin to think it shall vindicate us. Such pictures, panoramas, scenes, antediluvian dramas with all that! Never saw or heard better."

In May, 1886, accompanied by a Miss Emily Kislingbury, and her maid, Louise, she left Würzburg for Ostend. Miss Kislingbury, an old friend, was returning to London via Ostend. They arrived early at the station, and the Countess Wachtmeister, seeing H.P.B. surrounded by piles of luggage, spoke to the guard, and after some difficulty made arrangements—doubtless with the assistance of a coin or two—for H.P.B. and company to have a compartment all to themselves. At last, H.P.B., with numerous suitcases and packages, cuckoo-clock, rugs, pillows, coverlets, handbags and the box containing the precious manuscript of *The Secret Doctrine*, was fitted in and nicely ensconced; but before the train started a passing official stopped, stared and began to tell her off about crowding out the compartment with luggage which should have been put into the guard's van. He shouted at her in German, and she shouted back in French, until the poor Countess wondered what on earth was going to happen. Fortunately the whistle went and the train began to move, leaving the official cursing on the platform.

At Cologne, she broke her journey for one or two days' rest. Herr Gebhard met her at the station, invited her to Elberfeld. H.P.B. accepted, which was a great pity, for on the polished parquet floor of the Gebhards' mansion at 2 Platzhoffstrasse, she slipped and fell, spraining her ankle and badly hurting herself. This accident kept her in bed for three weeks, and she did not arrive at Ostend until 8 July. Her sister, Vera, and her niece, also called Vera, were waiting for her there.

To the Countess, who had returned to Sweden, she wrote: "For one night at the *Continental* I had to pay 117 francs for our rooms. Then, in despair, my sister rose in the morning and felt herself drawn to a certain part of the Boulevard on the seashore, and in a side street she found an apartment with a whole *rez de chaussée* to let, three splendid rooms on the left and two on the right of the passage, or five rooms and a kitchen downstairs, the whole for 1,000 francs for the season, and 100 francs a month afterwards, so what could I do? Result, your legless friend established in a suite of rooms on the left, and my sister has two rooms, a bedroom, an elegant one, and a parlour or dining-room on the right side of the passage. When she goes away, which will be in ten days, that suite remains empty. But then, perhaps Mr. Sinnett will come. It is nice to have two such rooms for one's friends. As for myself, I have lovely rooms, bedroom running by a separated arch and satin hangings into a large study, and a small drawing-room with a piano in it near by. I have the whole floor to myself.

"Yes, I will try and settle once more at my *Secret Doctrine*. But it is hard. I am very weak, dear, I feel so poorly and legless, as I never did when you were there to care for me. . . . I am as nervous as a she-cat, I feel I am ungrateful. But then, it is because gratitude has ever been shown in ancient symbology to reside in people's heels, and having lost my legs how can I be expected to have any?"

In August, Sinnett arrived on a brief visit, found the great occultist busy writing her *Secret Doctrine* which, she had now decided, was something more than *Isis Unveiled* rewritten. He met her sister, Madame Zhelikhovsky, and he suggests some unfriendliness between her and him, but does not say why, and he left the Villa Nova, in which Madame Blavatsky had her splendid apartment with satin curtains, conscious of the birth of a new era in the Theosophical Society, and a dissolution of Madame Blavatsky's close attachment to, and reliance on, himself.

On 23 August, H.P.B. had written to Anna Kingsford, "I winter here, and therefore you will find me when you like. Only if you would see me alone, better come towards the end of September, when the whole house will be at your disposal. In October I will have here theosophists who do not feel, unfortunately, so friendly to you as I do." The rank and file of theosophists were not feeling friendly to Anna Kingsford, the former president of the London Lodge, because she had broken away from the Theosophical Society by dissolving her Hermetic Lodge (of the Theosophical Society), and establishing her own independent Hermetic Society, which was devoted to Christian mysticism and ignored the Mahatmas.

Anna and her companion, Edward Maitland, arrived at Ostend on 5 October; they were on their way to Paris and the Riviera—a flight for life Maitland called it, for Anna was seriously ill, more ill than Madame Blavatsky, with tuberculosis. They went to a hotel, booked two rooms, rested a while, and then proceeded to Villa Nova where they found Madame

Blavatsky and the Countess Wachtmeister. They did not want to stay with Madame Blavatsky, not for any personal reasons, but because they thought that living for a day or two in the same house as the Founder of the Theosophical Society would "seriously prejudice" their work—a more fatuous and faint-hearted reason one can hardly think of, even though the Theosophical Society was being held up to ridicule and contempt at that time. Madame Blavatsky, with her lion heart, could not have behaved like this. And when she realized that her two guests were not going to stay with her, she took it, in the words of Maitland, "so seriously to heart as to show that our continued refusal would very deeply wound her".

The leaders of the Hermetic Society moved their luggage from their hotel to Villa Nova. Maitland gives three reasons for their change of mind: one, Anna was unwilling "to wound further a fellow-woman"; two, she wanted to enlist Madame Blavatsky—in spite of her bad reputation—on behalf of the anti-vivisection cause; three, H.P.B., who strikes me again as one of the world's great jokers, promised Anna that if she would come and stay in the house with her, she should see the Master Koot Hoomi. The last reason was irresistible. They stayed for three days and Koot Hoomi never appeared, and He was quite right not to. Then Anna and Maitland flew away, but not, alas, to life, but into death, for this extraordinary, and in some ways great, woman died two years later at the age of forty-two.

When the Countess had arrived at Ostend at the beginning of October, she was shocked to see how ill H.P.B. looked; and when she observed that her beloved teacher and friend became drowsy after lunch and was unable for an hour or so to work, she grew alarmed. A doctor was, of course, in attendance, but she grew steadily worse. The Countess tried to engage a nurse, but could get only a *sœur de charité* who, when the Countess wasn't looking, would hold up her crucifix at H.P.B. and entreat her to come into the fold of the Only Church before it was too late.

The Belgian doctor tried his several remedies, but they were of no avail. H.P.B. was now in a heavy, lethargic state and nothing, it seemed, could arouse her from it. In desperation, the Countess telegraphed to a Dr. Ashton Ellis, English theosophist. He arrived at three in the night. The following day he conferred with the Belgian doctor.

Frau Gebhard also arrived to lend a hand, but whether she came before or after Dr. Ellis is not clear. She suggested that H.P.B. should make her will, not that she had much to leave —her rings, clothes, copyrights of her books.

The night passed, and several times the following day Dr. Ellis massaged H.P.B. Then the Countess began to detect "that peculiar faint odour of death which sometimes precedes dissolution". She thought how empty her life would be without H.P.B. *The Secret Doctrine* wasn't finished yet, and the Society was in a state of chaos. "My whole soul rose in rebellion at the thought of losing her. . . . I gave a bitter cry and knew no more."

What exactly happened is not clear. It was night-time and the Countess, apparently, was standing by her beloved teacher. Or was she in her own bed trying to fall asleep?

When she came back to consciousness, the early morning light was stealing in, and H.P.B. was looking calmly at her.

"Countess, come here," she said.

The Countess flew to her side.

"What has happened, H.P.B.? You look so different."

"Master has been here. He gave me the choice, that I could die and be free if I would, or I might live and finish *The Secret Doctrine*. He told me how great my suffering would be and what a terrible time I would have before me in England (for I am to go there); but when I thought of those students to whom I shall be permitted to teach a few things, and of the Theosophical Society in general, to which I have already given my heart's blood, I accepted the sacrifice. Fetch me some coffee and something to eat, and give me my tobacco-box."

Chapter Twenty-eight

INTO THE SILENCE

THE Countess went to Sweden and H.P.B., accompanied by Dr. Ashton Ellis, to England. She arrived at Dover on 1 May, 1887, and the following day proceeded to "Maycot", a small villa at Upper Norwood on the outskirts of London, owned by Mabel Collins, the popular novelist with mystical leanings.

Prominent among the throng of theosophists around her were Bertram Keightley, Secretary of the London Lodge, and his nephew, Dr. Archibald Keightley, who was a year older than uncle Bertram. They told H.P.B. that they wanted to work for the Masters, and revive the theosophical movement. H.P.B. replied that the job at the moment was *The Secret Doctrine*. She asked them if they were prepared to help her write it. Of course they were.

"All right, then," said H.P.B. "Here you are—get to work right away." She handed over the manuscript for them to read and make their comments on.

Here in Norwood the poet Yeats found her. He brought an introduction from Charles Johnston, who married H.P.B.'s niece, Vera, the following year. Yeats complains that he was kept waiting a long time in an outer room before he was admitted to her presence, and even then he was kept waiting, for she was deep in conversation with someone. He wandered through the folding doors into the next room, saw her cuckoo-clock. The weights were off and, he says, it had certainly stopped, but in spite of this the cuckoo leaped out.

He wandered back to H.P.B. "Your clock has hooted me," he said, interrupting her.

"It often hoots at a stranger," she replied.

He asked if there was a spirit in it, to which she gave an evasive answer. He described her as "a sort of old Irish peasant woman with an air of humour and an audacious power".

To Norwood also came Alice Cleather, friend of Bertram Keightley. She had long wanted to meet Madame Blavatsky, and when she was about a hundred yards from "Maycot" she heard her angry voice carried on the breeze. H.P.B. would not see her. As Bertram explained, the Old Lady was in one of her tempers. Mrs. Cleather returned to her home in Eastbourne, all her meagre savings gone, reflecting sadly that she was unworthy, that was why H.P.B. would not see her.

Now that H.P.B. was settling down permanently in England, Sinnett saw her as a kind of super ornament to the London Lodge, of which he was President, but she thought otherwise, and founded, with the Keightleys, Mabel Collins, Dr. Ashton Ellis and others, the "Blavatsky Lodge", and thus turned her back on A. P. Sinnett. Since she was cut off from immediate access to *The Theosophist*, which was still being published in India, she started, in the face of the Colonel's protest, a new magazine called *Lucifer.*

"Maycot" was too small; there wasn't room enough for all the visitors who came to see her. The wealthy Keightleys therefore found a house at 17 Lansdowne Road, sometimes described as in Holland Park and on other occasions as at Notting Hill, furnished its several floors and handed it over for her use. She moved in during the autumn of 1887.

In the evenings, when she had ceased work for the day, she would sit in her big armchair, her back to the folding doors of the drawing-room against which stood the portraits of the Masters. Yeats did not think much of them, called them "ideal Indian heads, painted by some most incompetent artist". She would scribble mystic symbols and play endless games of patience, and, of course, dominate the room with her talk. Yeats, this time, likened her to a female Dr. Johnson, but all

Dr. Johnson and Madame Blavatsky had in common was a habit of holding court.

The Colonel arrived from India in the summer of 1888 and wrote a description of his "chum" in her new home for *The Theosophist*.

"The President found Madame Blavatsky in bad health, but working with desperate and pertinacious energy. An able physician told him that the fact of her even being alive at all was in itself a miracle. . . . [She] is living at 17 Lansdowne Road, Holland Park, with three theosophical friends, among them her devoted guardian, nurse and consoler, the Countess Wachtmeister of Sweden, who has attended her throughout all her serious illnesses of the past three years. The house is a pleasant one, in a quiet neighbourhood, and the back of it looks upon a small private park or compound, common to the occupants of all the houses which surround it. Madame Blavatsky's rooms are on the ground floor, she being practically unable to go up or down stairs. Her desk faces a large window looking out upon the green grass and leafy trees of Holland Park; at her right and left hands are tables and book-racks filled with books of reference; and all about the room are her Indian souvenirs—Benares bronzes, Palghat mats, Adoni carpets, Moradabad platters, Kashmir plaques, and Singhalese images, which were so familiar to visitors at Adyar in the old days."

After touring Europe, the Colonel returned to India and began to make plans for his crusade in Japan during 1889.

H.P.B.'s "desperate and pertinacious energy" had made the pile of written sheets rise to three feet. The Keightleys found it only a "confused muddle and jumble", and Bertram, who was sub-editor of *Lucifer*, described it as *Isis Unveiled* worsened.

She swore when she heard their opinion, and then asked Mabel Collins for hers. Mabel, alas, agreed with the Keightleys. Whereupon H.P.B. handed back the three-foot-high manuscript and told Bertram and Archibald to "go to Hell and get on with it". They began by getting it typed; then they divided the work into two volumes, the first of which was called *Cosmogenesis*, the second, *Anthropogenesis*, and by the transposing of material, and making notes of omissions, they gradually got the *œuvre* into some kind of order.

The next problem was to find somebody to publish it, but as no one would undertake it on terms which were acceptable, they decided to publish it themselves; and to this end they founded, with £1,500 supplied by the Keightleys, the Theosophical Publishing Company. The great work was published in two volumes in the autumn of 1888.

The most enthusiastic review it received was in the *Pall Mall Gazette* from the pen of Annie Besant.

"Can you review these?" said William T. Stead, the editor, putting the two bulky volumes into her hands. "My young men all fight shy of them, but you are quite mad enough on these subjects to make something of them." He was thinking of her enthusiasm for Sinnett's *Occult World*.

No one has explained why the free-thinking labour leader Annie Besant, companion of Charles Bradlaugh, abandoned free-thinking, abandoned socialism, abandoned the great orator and republican Bradlaugh, and became overnight a theosophist. It was a sudden passing over into the opposite, an enantiodromia, to use a Jungian term; St. Paul is the most celebrated case of this. Lenin said of Bernard Shaw that he was a good man fallen among Fabians, and of Annie Besant, who had organized the match-girls' strike and led them to victory, it can certainly be said that she was a good labour leader who had fallen among theosophists.

After reading *The Secret Doctrine*, and writing her review, Mrs. Besant wanted to meet the author. Stead knew H.P.B. personally—he had also known, and admired, Anna Kingsford, now dead and buried at Atcham with a marble cross over her grave—and he gave her a letter of introduction.

"I too have long been wishing to make your acquaintance as there is nothing in the world I admire more than pluck and the rare courage to come out and state one's opinions boldly in the face of all the world, including Mrs. Grundy," wrote H.P.B. in giving Annie Besant an appointment.

Accompanied by Herbert Burrows, she took the tube one warm spring evening in 1889 to Notting Hill Station, and walked from there to 17 Lansdowne Road. It was a memorable occasion in the annals of theosophy.

Burrows, who wrote his own account of the event, makes the point that he was not foolish enough to look for miracles; he did *not* expect to see the famous Madame Blavatsky float in the air before him, nor tea-cups appear from nowhere, which rather suggests that he did expect something of the kind. And why not? Madame Blavatsky, in spite of her weight, had levitated up to the chandelier to get a light for her cigarette, and had materialized at least one tea-cup.

Annie Besant's account of the great occasion is written in breathless tones. She went quickly through the hall and outer room of 17 Lansdowne Road and through a folding door to behold a stout figure in a large armchair playing patience. The stout figure glanced up, large rolling blue eyes were fixed on her and on the shadowy Mr. Burrows.

"My dear Mrs. Besant, I have so long wished to see you," said H.P.B. to the forty-one-year-old reformer and atheist.

Like the Countess Wachtmeister, Francesca Arundale and others, Annie Besant was conscious of a sudden leaping forth of her heart—the phrase is hers—but a moment later she was aware of a feeling of aversion, of a desire to draw away, of rebelliousness.

H.P.B. smoked cigarettes and talked of travels in foreign lands, said nothing about occultism, produced no phenomena, and only when the meeting was at its end did she plunge into the heart of the matter. "Oh, my dear Mrs. Besant, if only you would come among us!"

At that moment the rebel who was Annie Besant died, and the theosophical movement gained its greatest leader.

* * *

The Sinnetts saw nothing of her now, and Mrs. Besant saw her daily. They heard with wry amusement that H.P.B. had made out of some of the members of her Blavatsky Lodge a kind of secret group called the Esoteric Section, with herself as president, for the purpose of bringing these members into closer contact with the Master. The Sinnetts did not need to belong to such a group for that purpose. In spite of the breach with Madame Blavatsky, they had established their own link with the Master Koot Hoomi, but by what method Sinnett does not say. "During the period of Mrs. Besant's residence with her—the last two years of her life—neither my wife nor I saw anything of her. We were in close touch with the Master, K.H. himself, by our own private arrangements and, as I have already explained, were emphatically warned by him to guard them from any possible interference by Madame Blavatsky. So the result of it was a complete extinction of our former intimate relations. I have never known exactly what strange tales she invented in order to keep Mrs. Besant from making acquaintance with us, as she might naturally have wished to do when becoming attached to the theosophical movement. In her autobiography she describes how, long before becoming acquainted with Madame Blavatsky and when investigating occult ideas of all kinds—'Into the darkness shot a ray of light—A. P. Sinnett's *Occult World* with its wonderfully suggestive letters'."

Thus, in a mysterious way, Alfred Percy Sinnett, one-time editor of the most important paper in India, *The Pioneer*, and latterly a writer of books on the White Brotherhood, found for himself a permanent source of enlightenment which sustained him in the face of financial and other difficulties.

In 1889 H.P.B. published her *Key to Theosophy*, a kind of theosophical catechism; and the following year appeared *The Voice of the Silence*, her translation of fragments of "The Book of the Golden Precepts" from the secret Tibetan sacerdotal language called Senzar. Some of the versicles of this little book, which is held in special reverence by theosophists, seem to me to have been added for good measure by the translator herself.

> "One single thought about the past that thou hast left behind will drag thee down and thou wilt have to start the climb anew.
>
> "Kill in thyself all memory of past experiences. Look not behind or thou art lost."

An aspect of Madame Blavatsky's personal problem is contained in these two aphorisms: she wished to cover up her past, and to forget about it. One wonders why. Most of the other aphorisms in *The Voice of the Silence,* such as

> "Aye, great is he, who is the slayer of desire."
>
> "The Mind is the great Slayer of the Real."

are typical of Eastern thought. Desire holds one in the interplay of opposites, the eternal oscillation between appetite and satiation. The "Mind" is here used in the sense of consciousness, upon which all our Western scientific knowledge is based, but which the East regards as only part of the world of illusion, and actually a hindrance to the apprehension of reality. By its marvellous system of yoga, the traditional East transcends consciousness.

On the whole, *The Voice of the Silence* seems to me to be inferior to the Chinese classic, the *Tao Tê Ching*. My own copy of *The Voice* was given to me in 1949 by a lady who lives in Colombo. On the fly-leaf she wrote: "This is the road She, H.P.B., trod . . . 'remain selfless to the endless end'."

* * *

Her friends bought her a brougham, that is, a one-horse closed carriage for two or four persons, in which she would sometimes go out for a drive. On one occasion she went with the Countess in the brougham to Hyde Park, looked at the fashionable crowd driving about in the warm sunshine, and on her return to Lansdowne Road, she turned a tear-stained face to young Alice Cleather and exclaimed, "Not a Soul among them—not *one*!"

Commented Alice, "It was a heart-cry of grief, a poignant illustration—and *my* first sight—of that 'helpless pity for the men of Karmic sorrow' (of which I had only just read in *The Voice of the Silence*) felt by those Great Ones who through countless lives have worked for the redemption of humanity."

The lease of 17 Lansdowne Road expired, and in July, 1890, the London headquarters of the Theosophical Society were removed to 19 Avenue Road, a large house standing in its own grounds, between Regent's Park and Swiss Cottage. An extra room for the Esoteric Section, and a meeting-hall—to hold two hundred persons of the Blavatsky Lodge—were built. It was here, during the few months that remained for her, that my hostess, in whose library I had found Dayananda Sarasvati's *Satyarth Prakash*, *Old Diary Leaves* and other works, was brought as a baby and sat on Madame Blavatsky's lap—but who brought her, and why, she had not said, and I had not asked.

Among the staff at 19 Avenue Road were Bertram and Archibald Keightley, the Countess Wachtmeister, Miss Emily Kislingbury, Herbert Burrows, George Mead, who was Madame Blavatsky's secretary, a classical scholar and, later, author of an interesting book on Gnosticism, Miss Laura Cooper, Mrs. Cooper-Oakley, who had accompanied H.P.B. to India in 1884, Walter Old and Claude Wright. Mead afterwards married Miss Cooper.

On 1 April, 1891, Mrs. Besant sailed away to New York to attend, as H.P.B.'s representative, the Fifth Convention of the Society, which was held in Boston. It was at this convention that a sceptical lady in the audience asked why it was that outsiders were always told that the Mahatma sages dwelt in such an inaccessible place as Tibet. The question was addressed to William Quan Judge, who replied with some acidity, "If they were anywhere in the United States, they would be pestered by reporters."

On 26 April H.P.B. caught influenza, and stopped smoking, which was considered a very bad sign indeed. On 3 May an abscess of the bronchial tube made it painful for her to swallow. On 6 May—a Wednesday—she got dressed and walked into the sitting-room, where she informed the doctor, Meynell, that she was dying. At midnight a change for the worse took place and, for a while, it looked as if it was the end—no perceptible pulse, difficulty in breathing—but the attack passed off. During the following day she got up and got dressed again, and, with assistance, walked into the sitting-room and asked for her large armchair. Dr. Meynell and his partner, Dr. Miller, arrived and Dr. Miller examined her chest. A consultation then took place between them, and afterwards Dr. Miller told Mrs. Cooper-Oakley and Miss Cooper that H.P.B.'s condition was very serious owing to her bronchitis. He advised a teaspoonful of brandy every two hours.

That night was a very painful one for her owing to her difficulty in breathing. She could not rest in any position and was finally propped up in her armchair. At four o'clock in the morning her pulse was stronger, and she seemed to be better. At nine o'clock Dr. Meynell arrived, and saw no cause for immediate anxiety. The patient seemed a little better, in fact. But at 11.30—on Friday, 8 May—after Dr. Meynell had gone, Mr. Claude Wright came to Miss Cooper, who was resting, and told her that H.P.B. had changed for the worse, and that the nurse did not think she could last much longer. Miss Cooper went quickly to her. H.P.B. was sitting in her armchair, slightly moving one of her feet, a sign, Miss Cooper tells us, of intent thought. She begged her to take some brandy, knelt down in front of her, and held the glass to her lips. H.P.B. managed to swallow the brandy, or the stimulant as Miss Cooper more politely calls it. But it was no use. H.P.B. was rapidly dying now. Suddenly there was a further change, and Miss Cooper saw her eyes grow dim. The nurse, unable to do anything, discreetly left the room.

Miss Cooper continued to kneel at H.P.B.'s side, her arm supporting the dear head of her beloved teacher; Mr. Old and Mr. Wright, who were also in the room, knelt down in front of her, and each took hold of an arm, to catch, as it were, the astral rays as they left her body. Thus, in her sixtieth year, died

Madame Blavatsky, the foundress of modern occultism, the Messenger of the White Brotherhood. "She passed away like a sentinel at his post," wrote Mrs. Cooper-Oakley, "in the armchair in which she taught and wrote—the best and truest of Teachers, the most faithful and untiring of Messengers".

The Colonel, who was in Australia, learnt of her death clairvoyantly before hearing of it by telegraph.

On 11 May her body was taken by train to Woking, and from there by hearse to the crematorium, the only one in England at that time. A certain "Saladin", who described himself as an agnostic, but who had strong theosophic sympathies, wrote a lively, not to say whimsical, account of the scene. He compared the crematorium, at which he had arrived as "one in a wagon-load of uncraped mourners", to a mixture of a chapel, a tile-kiln and a factory chimney.

> "You enter by a mortuary chapel, passing through which you emerge through heavy folding doors of oak, and find yourself in an apartment, in the middle of the floor of which there is a great iron object like the boiler of a locomotive, but supported by and embedded in masonry. The theosophists crowd round this boiler-looking object with anxious but decorous curiosity, to gratify which, one of the attendants turned, on the end of the object, an iron snib which left a circular orifice about the size of a crown piece. Those present looked in succession into this opening; most, I noticed, gave one quick glance, and turned away with an involuntary shudder. When it came to my turn to peep in I wondered not that my predecessors had shuddered. If Virgil or Milton or Dante had ever seen such an Inferno, they would never have written about the Inferno at all, relinquishing the theme as utterly ineffable. Inside that furnace was filled with towels of fire whisked by the arm of the very Devil himself. I can look on a common furnace; but I shall never again peep through that iron eye-let into the viscera of hell."

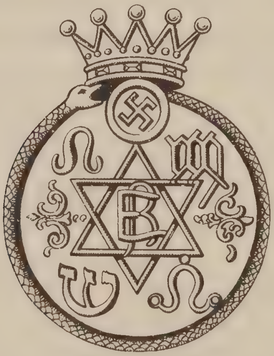
The hearse arrived, and the coffin was carried into the chapel and laid upon an oak trestle. Then George Mead, H.P.B.'s private secretary and General Secretary of the European

Section of the Society, whom "Saladin" described as a young gentleman of refined features, began to read in the solemn hush a moving address:

"Friends and Brother Theosophists. H. P. Blavatsky is dead, but H.P.B., our teacher and friend, is alive. . . ."

When he had finished and the theosophists stood musing and wondering what was going to happen now, "four employés"—I quote again from "Saladin"—"who did not look exactly like either stokers or butchers, but had some resemblance to each, entered, and, in a businesslike manner, went two to each end of the trestle, and, raising it by its four brass handles, moved off with it through the doorway. Four theosophists who had known and loved Madame Blavatsky, and had, like myself, found the grandest and the worst-abused woman in the world identical, followed her remains through that wide doorway down to the furnace. The mass of flowers wafted us another wealth of fragrance as they disappeared, and the great doorway was slammed and bolted with a decisive mastery suggestive of the fall of the portcullis of Hades."

It only remains to add that her ashes were divided into three portions—for Europe, America, and India.



Her mystic brooch

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